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About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners in order to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

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Al-Qa`ida in Iraq: Lessons from the Mosul Security Operation

By Michael Knights



THE DEMISE OF al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI)¹ has been heralded on a number of occasions during the past five years, only to witness the movement adapt to survive by shifting to new safe havens. Following the conclusion of the latest phase of Operation Za'ir al-Assad fi Sawlat al-Haqq (Lion's Roar in Rightful Assault), or the Mosul security plan, the subject of al-Qa`ida in Iraq's fortunes is once again in the headlines. The 10-day push by security forces into insurgent neighborhoods between May 10-20, 2008, witnessed very low levels of violence, with the number of recorded

incidents dropping by 85%.² As the result of leadership targeting and the loss of safe havens, Multinational Force Iraq (MNF-I) spokesman Rear Admiral Patrick Driscoll characterized AQI and other insurgent groups in Mosul as being "off-balance and on the run."³

Conversely, there is also a degree of caution based on AQI's proven tendency to relocate, lay low and reemerge in a new area months later. A late May video recording released by the al-Furqan Institute for Media Production, the media production unit most closely associated with the Islamic State of Iraq or ISI umbrella movement,⁴ saw

1 AQI has become a catch-all phrase used to describe any Sunni Arab diehard militant who has not integrated into the Awakening (*sabwa*) movements or their associated police auxiliary units, the so-called "Sons of Iraq." For the purposes of this article, however, AQI refers to the terrorist group that has been allied with and subordinate to al-Qa`ida since 2004. It is led by Abu Ayyub al-Masri (an Egyptian also known as Abu Hamza al-Muhajir).

2 This information was from a statement made by then Multinational Division North (MND-N) commander Major General Mark Hertling.

3 Gerry J. Gilmore, "Al-Qaida in Iraq Is On the Run, Officials Say," American Forces Press Service, May 27, 2008.

4 Since the inception of the ISI umbrella movement in October 2006, there have been strong indications that AQI

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE JUN 2008		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Al-Qa'ida in Iraq: Lessons From the Mosul Security Operation				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Combating Terrorism Center, Lincoln Hall, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY, 10996				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 28	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

a spokesman claiming to represent ISI in Ninawa Province warning that “until now, we have not been engaged...because we are the ones who control the hour to start the initiative and we will choose the time for retaliation or engagement.”⁵ The communiqué suggested that AQI elements had dispersed before the 10-day security push began and that the vast majority of arrests had fallen on the Iraqi population of Mosul instead of AQI/ISI leaders.

The true picture lies somewhere between these two images. The only way to get closer to an accurate assessment is to get into the weeds of the Mosul security operation and to blend street-level tactical data with the overarching strategic context of AQI’s

“Within the north, the city of Mosul has consistently been an area of strength for takfiri and Islamist-nationalist resistance groups in Iraq.”

nationwide reverses and growing Iraqi government sensitivity to the Sunni Arab community’s needs. This article draws on a database of 5,984 geo-located incidents reported in Ninawa Province from April 2007 to April 2008, itself a sub-set of a data set of more than 100,000 geo-located incidents recorded across the whole of Iraq during the last 18 months.⁶ Geospatial intelligence is then combined with MNF-I, Iraqi and open source media reportage plus direct commentary from embedded reporters in Iraq. As always, the key to understanding a terrorist group is to look closely at its actions.

is the dominant force within the ISI, which is notionally led by Abu Abdullah al-Rashid al-Baghdadi (also known as Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi), an Iraqi spokesman that the U.S. government claims is a fictional figure designed to give the movement an Iraqi face.

5 Bushra Juhi, “Militant Group Warns of Mosul Retaliation,” Associated Press, May 27, 2008.

6 The database is maintained by private security company Olive Group and represents information gained through more than 1,800 days of consecutive on-the-ground operations in Iraq. For more details, please contact mknights@olivegroup.com.

Mosul’s Importance

The center of gravity for the Sunni Arab resistance has been inexorably shifting northwards during the past year. Southern and western AQI operating areas have been seriously constrained by counter-insurgency approaches and the surge of forces developed by MNF-I. According to Olive Group’s databases, Anbar Province saw reported incidents drop from 976 in January 2007 to 158 in January 2008. Babil, likewise, witnessed a drop from 544 monthly incidents in January 2007 to 180 one year later. Baghdad is no longer the epicenter of the insurgency; in pre-surge March 2007, MNF-I estimated that 80% of the violence in Iraq occurred in the region within 19 miles of Baghdad. By January 2008, this figure had dropped to around 25%. Iraq’s capital witnessed a decline from 1,259 reported incidents in January 2007 to 425 incidents a year later.⁷

Sunni Arab areas north of the capital now contain a far larger share of violent incidents than Baghdad, Babil and Anbar. Yet, the most stubborn holdout has been Ninawa, where incidents actually increased from 463 per month in January 2007 to 685 per month in January 2008 and later to an all-time high of 747 incidents in February 2008.⁸

Within the north, the city of Mosul has consistently been an area of strength for *takfiri*⁹ and Islamist-nationalist resistance groups in Iraq. Mosul is home to a high proportion of the Saddam-era Iraqi officer corps, and the post-war looting of a number of major Ammunition Supply Points in and around the city left the metropolitan area seeded with thousands of tons of munitions. Mosul was also a major center of Saddam’s “Return to Faith” campaign in the 1990s, and the city’s position astride roads headed toward Turkey and Syria made it a transshipment point for *takfiri* groups moving through Iraq during

that decade, including Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi’s people-moving networks and the Ansar al-Islam movement. Since 2003, the direct connection to Syria via Tal Afar and Sinjar means that Mosul is a key hub in the northern “rat-line” bringing foreign volunteers into Iraq via the al-Rabi’a area, which is arguably the only fully functional line still processing significant numbers of foreign volunteers.¹⁰

As the capital of Ninawa Province, some consider Mosul as a new center of gravity for Sunnis in Iraq, with Sunni Arabs representing approximately half of its 1.4 million residents, the balance comprising approximately 500,000 Kurds and 200,000 Turkmen (Shi’a and Sunni), Assyrian Christians and other groups. The ethnic tension caused by this diversity has worked in the favor of *takfiri* groups because it has constrained the development of *sabwa* and Sons of Iraq movements, at least until recently. Kurdish-dominated Iraqi Army forces garrison most areas, and Sunni fears of “reverse-Arabization” (ethnic cleansing) by Kurdish forces have proven particularly beneficial to *takfiri* elements all along the multi-ethnic swathe bordering the Kurdistan Regional Government zone. Furthermore, Mosul and its environs have seen a very sparse level of garrisoning by MNF-I troops since early 2004, with large tracts of the city ceded to the insurgency for 12-18 months at a time.¹¹

“Routine” AQI Activity in Mosul

It is worth examining the types of activity undertaken by AQI and similar movements in Ninawa Province during the last 12 months. Mosul sits at the center of a number of conflict zones; to the west are Tal Afar and Sinjar, large towns strung along the *takfiri* “rat-line” to Syria, as well as rural staging posts that fan out from the main road into the desert along the border. To the south, a range of rural farming communities along the Tigris River is a crossroads for *takfiri* elements moving up and down the river and interacting with other important AQI operating areas such as Hawija; the Jazira desert areas

7 These figures were derived from Olive Group’s database.

8 Ibid.

9 The term *takfiri* in this article refers to Sunni insurgent groups that justify violence against some Muslims and all non-Muslims because their religious beliefs are not compatible with the group. *Takfiri* groups in Iraq include al-Qa`ida in Iraq and its affiliates, plus Ansar al-Sunna/Ansar al-Islam.

10 Personal interview, U.S. military intelligence officer, May 2008.

11 See the March 2003 coverage provided by independent embedded journalist Bill Roggio at The Long War Journal, available at www.longwarjournal.com.

around Lake Tharthar and stretching to the Syria border; the Saddam-era “presidential security triangle” cities and towns in Salah al-Din province; and the Hamrin mountain “switch-line” (linking Hawija to Tuz Khurmatu and the Diyala River Valley).

AQI plays a major role in seeking to maintain Mosul as a lawless environment in which such movements can operate freely. According to MNF-I and Iraqi military intelligence officers in Mosul, AQI and other *takfiri* groups behave differently in Mosul than they have in areas such as Anbar in the past; specifically, there has been notably less animus between *takfiri* elements and the local Sunni Arab community and fewer attempts to impose Shari’a codes or take over leadership of communities from local Iraqis. Individual neighborhoods bear the graffiti of multiple movements, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Reform and Jihad Front (the Islamic Army in Iraq front movement). A complex mesh of affiliations means that Mosul’s *muhalla* (blocks), *nabiya* (sub-districts) and *qada’a* (districts) are often shared between Ba’athist, Islamist-nationalist and *takfiri* groups. There is considerable blurring between cells, and the most important feature connecting individual attacks to specific groups is financial sponsorship of the action.

Until preparation for the current security operation began, offensive military activities sponsored by manpower-lite funding heavy groups such as AQI mainly focused on the Main Supply Routes running through Mosul. On the west bank, military traffic on Highway 1—the trucking road running along the Tigris River all the way to al-Rabi’a—has been a consistent target of roadside Improvised Explosive Device (IED) crews. On the eastern side, Highway 2 links Turkey to the Tigris River Valley cities and later Baghdad and has also consistently been attacked by IED crews. With MNF-I units relatively thin on the ground in 2007, sponsoring paid-for IED attacks on strategic road systems remains the best way of predictably acquiring targets and a means by which AQI/ISI and other movements can “keep the flame of resistance alight.”

Takfiri groups operate in somewhat different ways in western Mosul and

eastern Mosul. Western Mosul is old Arab Mosul and even though the city’s ethnic and sectarian communities are densely interwoven in almost all districts, the west is considered to have a higher proportion of Sunni Arabs. In western Mosul, AQI and other movements used the relative thinness of MNF-I presence in 2007 to attempt to drive out non-Sunnis from their neighborhoods, particularly Christians and Shebaks, a community of Shi’a Kurds. In eastern Mosul and in the government district west of the Tigris, AQI and other groups tend to launch three to five suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attacks per month against provincial government, security forces and particularly Kurdish political party offices.¹²

Takfiri groups became major players in organized crime in western Mosul. In addition to the usual AQI fundraising activities such as ransoming kidnapped people and reselling hijacked fuels (gasoline, cooking gas and diesel) and

“Once the government operation began, however, Mosul’s *takfiri* groups went largely passive, resulting in a reduction of reported incidents by 85%.”

consumer goods, AQI has become involved in considerably more complicated criminal endeavors in Mosul. These schemes involve extorting hundreds of thousands of dollars from larger businesses ranging from soft drink manufacturers to cell phone companies by levying up to 20% of the value of contracts as protection money. Cell phone towers have been destroyed when vendors failed to pay sufficient bribes to *takfiri* elements. In real estate, AQI insurgents stole 26 ledgers that contained the deeds to almost \$90 million worth of property and then resold them.¹³

12 These figures were derived from Olive Group’s database.

13 This information was according to Lieutenant Colonel Eric Welsh, a U.S. Army battalion commander in Mosul.

AQI Defensive Operations

Many of the terrorist attacks in Mosul in 2007 were aimed at preventing the establishment of government institutions in insurgent neighborhoods, typically involving the murder of individual policemen or Iraqi Army personnel, as well as the destruction of vehicle checkpoints or recruiting stations. As with most violent activity undertaken by *takfiri* groups, intimidation is the mechanism. This effort was kicked up a notch when it became clear that the Iraqi government was planning a major security operation in Mosul.

It was the response of local *takfiri* and Islamist-nationalist insurgent groups to these actions that caused the spike of 747 reported incidents in Ninawa Province in March 2008. A range of vehicle checkpoints were attacked with suicide vest bombs. Large suicide VBIED were employed to physically shatter new Combat Outposts. On March 23, for instance, Combat Outpost Inman in western Mosul was breached by a suicide truck bomb loaded with an estimated 5,000-10,000 pounds of homemade explosives. The dump truck, armored against small-arms fire, detonated mid-point in the facility, killing 13 Iraqi soldiers, wounding 42 and leaving a crater 15 feet deep and 25 feet wide. Four other VBIEDs in the 2,000-5,000 pound range were used or discovered in Mosul in March alone. Insurgents likewise breached the Riyadh Line—the berms built around Mosul—with explosives on a number of occasions, sometimes seeding the gaps with IEDs to kill repair crews. On the eve of the Mosul security operation, Iraqi Army troops foiled a suicide VBIED attack against the 2nd Iraqi Army Division headquarters at the Ninawa Oprawi hotel.¹⁴

Once the government operation began, however, Mosul’s *takfiri* groups went largely passive, resulting in a reduction of reported incidents by 85%.¹⁵ A tight curfew and driving ban and the berming

For more details on the criminalization of AQI, see Michael Knights, “Endangered Species - Al-Qaeda in Iraq Adapts to Survive,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, May 2008.

14 The attacker drove a Volkswagen Passat, a common brand of car used by the Ba’athist regime to reward military service.

15 “Operation ‘Lion’s Roar’ Reduces Insurgent Attacks in Mosul,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, May 22, 2008.

of the city had an immediate effect on the ability of *takfiri* groups to deploy car bombs, underlining the value of mobility to such cells. Almost no suicide vest operations were launched either, potentially pointing to a more general lack of available personnel for martyrdom operations. Although 125 roadside IEDs were defused and 1.5 tons of C4 and TNT were recovered during the May 10-20 period, roadside IED crews were also largely ineffective in blunting the Iraqi security operation, with a notable lack of effective attacks.¹⁶

Leadership disruption probably also played a role in the muted response. AQI/ISI in Mosul had been under intensive attacks for months. According to MNF-I spokesmen, the number of senior AQI leaders killed or captured in the months of October to December 2007 topped 130, including individuals from almost all levels of the organization, such as regional *amirs*; facilitators involved in transporting leaders, foreign fighters or cash; and specialist cells involved in the development and employment of suicide car bombs and roadside IEDs.¹⁷ In early 2008, another 30 leadership targets were killed or captured in Mosul alone, including eastern Mosul *amir* Ibrahim Ahmad `Umar al-Sabawi, northeastern Mosul *amir* Ayyad Jassim Muhammad `Ali, and southeastern Mosul *amir* Abu Yasir al-Sa`udi. Halfway through the May 10-20 operation, a further 200 Tier 1 and Tier 2 AQI/ISI commanders were captured.¹⁸ On May 20, MNF-I reported that the purported overall AQI *amir* of Mosul, `Abd al-Khaliq Awad Ismail al-Sabawi, had been captured with his son in Tikrit.

The State of AQI/ISI

The location of `Abd al-Khaliq al-Sabawi's detention is an important pointer that AQI/ISI leadership had already left Mosul by the time the

operation was underway or were largely based in outlying rural villages to begin with. Indicators of migration to a predominately rural-based movement have been visible for some time. AQI/ISI no longer stands and fights to control urban terrain, although the movement certainly tried to prevent some neighborhoods from being penetrated by government forces in the run-up to the Mosul operation. Whereas the downscaling of local coalition force levels and AQI resurgence historically followed security operations, the "Iraqi surge" means Iraqi Army neighborhood presence is more permanent. AQI/ISI are learning that urban populations cannot be controlled indefinitely and that city streets cannot be held against Iraqi forces.

This is particularly true in Mosul, where the multiethnic neighborhoods are difficult to operate in once security forces have established a permanent presence and can collect tip-offs from the public. The government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has backed the current Mosul operation with a range of political concessions designed to swing the bulk of the Sunni Arab population in Mosul away from the insurgency. Senior Kurdish figures have been removed from the provincial council, the Ninawa Operations Center and the 2nd Iraqi Army Division and have been replaced with Sunni Arabs from Mosul families. Provincial elections in November should further strengthen Sunni Arab influence in provincial governance. *Sabwa* and Sons of Iraq movements are being established, and fast-track judicial proceedings are increasing the pace at which Sunni males are released from government detention. Perhaps most importantly to the military families of Sunni Arab Mosul, there is genuine anticipation that military age males will again be able to take up their traditional profession of service in locally-raised Iraqi Army units.¹⁹ In other words, General David Petraeus' surge strategy has finally returned to Mosul where the general initially tried many of its components during his tenure there in 2003-2004.

19 Personal interviews, Mosul-based U.S. and Iraqi military intelligence officials, May 2008. There are also a number of useful Mosul bloggers who report on local views, such as "A Star from Mosul" at www.asterfrom-mosul.blogspot.com.

The Petraeus strategy and the Iraqi surge have made AQI/ISI leery of major population centers. It is not in such a movement's nature to fight in an entirely clandestine nature, and they tend to seek operational spaces that they can control, if only for short periods of time. AQI would rather be a big fish in a small pond; the alternative—a small fish in a big pond, classic urban terrorism—is increasingly difficult to execute.

Constant relocation is one of the factors driving AQI/ISI to decentralize and dissolve into the broader pool of Iraqi-led insurgent movements. Centralized control of funding is one of the defining characteristics of AQI/ISI and a key source of influence for the foreign

"AQI/ISI are learning that urban populations cannot be controlled indefinitely and that city streets cannot be held against Iraqi forces."

leadership cadre of the movement. The criminalization of the movement combined with MNF-I attacks on leadership and funding have loosened the ties between the foreign *amirs* and their Iraqi foot soldiers, the latter of which are often attracted by financial inducements.

The picture that emerges is that of an organization that is moving away from centralized control by a national *amir*, underlined by the reduction of the reward offered for AQI/ISI leader Abu Ayyub al-Masri.²⁰ Indeed, there are strong signs that the al-Qa`ida leadership in Pakistan has deliberately sent seasoned fighters to bolster the foreign fighter element in the hope of maintaining some measure of control over the organization; on March 2, 2008, Rear Admiral Gregory Smith noted that Abu Yasir al-Sa`udi and Hamdan al-Hajji, two Saudi *amirs*, were drawn from the Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict zone to Mosul in November 2007 by AQI commander Abu Ayyub al-

16 "125 Bombs Defused in Mosul," *Voices of Iraq*, May 22, 2008.

17 Figures conglomerated from U.S. Department of Defense briefings on al-Qa`ida in Iraq leadership targeting.

18 "Security Improves in Iraq's Ninevah Province, General Says," American Forces Press Service, May 22, 2008. According to Ma. Gen. Mark Hertling, Tier 1 operatives are operational leaders who finance operations or provide ideological guidance. Tier 2 operatives are "bat-talion commanders" commanding groups of 5-30 fighters. Hertling described Tier 2 operatives as "the ones that put up IEDs, VBIEDs, sniper cells."

20 Lennox Samuels, "Al Qaeda Nostra," *Newsweek*, May 21, 2008.

Masri.²¹ Foreigners stand out, however, making imported leaders vulnerable to coalition attacks; Abu Yasir al-Sa`udi and Hamdan al-Hajji, for example, were killed on February 27.

The “Iraqification” of AQI

Combined with a reduced flow of foreign volunteers, decentralization could see other Iraqi-led movements such as Ansar al-Sunna/Ansar al-Islam eclipsing AQI/ISI. It is not hard to imagine a declining role for the foreign elements of AQI, with international jihadists falling back into their more typical role of bankrolling native elements of insurgent operations to keep the flame of resistance alight. According to this scenario, increasingly Iraqi- and foreign-led *takfiri* groups would use criminal fundraising to finance insurgent operations long after any popular base for resistance had eroded, with money greasing the wheels of the “professional resistance”—those Sunni Arab IED cells undertaking paid-for attacks throughout the Saddam-era “presidential security triangle” formed by Beyji, Baghdad and Ramadi.

Major General Mark Hertling and his Iraqi counterparts are confident that about half of the paid-for Tier 3 elements of AQI—known as the “pipe swingers”—could be detached from terrorism by political and economic engagement.²² With the extension of the Petraeus doctrine to Mosul, the less committed insurgents are finally being boiled away to reveal the skeleton of the “professional resistance.” In Mosul, as in the rest of Sunni Iraq, reducing this hardcore cadre and making the next major step-charge in improved security may take far longer than the year-long “surge.”

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²¹ See statement from Rear Admiral Gregory Smith, Director of Communications, Deputy Spokesman, Multi-National Force Iraq, March 2, 2008.

²² This information is according to Maj. Gen. Mark Hertling, speaking at a Department of Defense news briefing in Iraq on June 9, 2008.

Engaging Islamists in the West

By Peter Mandaville

IN RECENT YEARS, U.S. national security policy orthodoxy has deemed it too far “out of the box” to suggest that Islamist groups might have a role to play in countering terrorist threats. According to this reasoning, even if movements such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood or its affiliates in other countries have renounced violence or are not actively involved in fostering militancy, they still at some level share common ideological foundations with groups such as al-Qa`ida. For others, the historical ties between the Muslim Brotherhood movement and Hamas are enough to rule out any possibility of engaging the former given the latter’s use of violence in Israel and Palestine. Leaving aside the colossal error inherent in treating Hamas and al-Qa`ida as terrorist equivalents—unfortunately a persistent theme in U.S. national security discourse in the aftermath of 9/11—the default assumption still appears to be that Islamism of any kind is more likely to be part of the problem rather than a potential component of counter-terrorism solutions. It is precisely this dogma that is in serious need of reexamination.

What is needed is not necessarily an active partnership between Islamists and counter-terrorism authorities; instead, national security and counter-terrorism policy must become more comfortable with shades of gray in how it approaches a Muslim world too often defined in terms of black and white categories.¹

The Fallacy of Focusing on Sufis

In searching for interlocutors and partners in the Muslim world, Western governments—and the United States in particular—have expressed a preference for doing business with what they call “moderate Muslims.” This has spawned something of a cottage industry, with various think-tanks rushing to find suitable candidates in the Muslim world and millions of dollars in public

and private funds mobilized to develop related outreach activities. The groups identified as potential partners by these efforts are telling in their own right. The RAND Corporation’s 2007 study *Building Moderate Muslim Networks*, for example, recommends that the United States engage secular, liberal and neo-traditional Sufi Muslims.² Looking more specifically at what this advice

“The default assumption still appears to be that Islamism of any kind is more likely to be part of the problem rather than a potential component of counter-terrorism solutions.”

entails in the European context, one finds in the RAND study an “approved list” of individual scholars without any grassroots following and a set of mostly marginal organizations espousing highly progressive interpretations of Islam that similarly lack any legitimacy within Muslim communities. Another complication lies in the fact that some of these groups, such as the United Kingdom’s Sufi Muslim Council, were established with the blessing (and sometimes the financial support) of European governments, which in the current climate renders them immediately suspect in the eyes of many Muslims.

Although there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the views and positions of these groups—indeed, many of them are intellectually sophisticated and highly courageous, having expressed opinions that make them targets of criticism (and sometimes even threats) from ultra-conservative and radical Muslim groups—the problem lies in their lack of transformative capacity. There are at least three aspects to consider in this last regard: 1. the groups designated as acceptable partners tend to be either so new or so at odds with prevailing

¹ See, for example, Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).

² Angel Rabasa, Cheryl Benard, Lowell H. Schwartz and Peter Sickel, *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007).

sentiments within the community as to possess neither a critical mass of followers nor any hope of developing one in the near future; 2. the individuals or groups in question often advocate secularism and liberalism in an uncritical manner that leaves little room to raise legitimate questions about how these norms and values are actually put into practice in the societies in which they live, particularly today vis-à-vis questions of civil liberties and foreign policy; 3. with particular reference to Sufi groups, the brotherhoods (*turuq*) in question, while often apolitical and primarily focused on inward, spiritual concerns, are hardly advocates of pluralism and democracy in the Muslim-majority countries in which they operate; indeed, with regard to their own internal governance practices, Sufi brotherhoods are often among the more authoritarian social structures to be found in Islam.

Counter-Terrorism Role for Mainstream Islamist Groups?

If Sufis and secular-liberal Muslims are not the answer, could mainstream Islamists play this role? The idea is, of course, not wholly new in and of itself. The renunciation of violence in the late 1990s by imprisoned ideologues of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (itself a radical splinter from the main body of the Muslim Brotherhood movement) has been a consistent reference point and resource in the Egyptian government's own recent counter-terrorism strategy. Similarly, the Saudi government has been relying on Wahhabi clerics, some of whom in the 1990s were either active members in, or had strong ties to, dissident Islamist groups in the kingdom, as a mainstay of its recent efforts to deradicalize Salafi-jihadi detainees. The governments in question claim enormous success in these endeavors and there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some measure of impact has been felt. Yet there is also good reason to question the efficacy and sustainability of such an approach. These are state-sponsored campaigns mounted by two of the pro-Western governments most consistently cited in the complaints of Usama bin Ladin and al-Qa`ida. The timing of the Islamists' "conversion" from violence and the careful management of their current activities by the state leaves them open to the criticism of having been co-opted

by the government. Any Islamists involved in counter-terrorism efforts would therefore have to be thoroughly and credibly independent and that means looking toward groups affiliated with the broad and diverse Muslim Brotherhood movement.

Since its renunciation of violence in the 1970s, the Muslim Brotherhood has evolved in ways that position it well to harvest, organize and redeploy oppositional political sentiments. Indeed, it is now conventional wisdom among analysts of political reform in the Middle East that the Islamists represent the only organized alternative to most ruling regimes in the region. Their comparative advantage as potential agents of social change lies in the fact that: 1. they are independent of existing authoritarian governments and consistently critical of the corruption, lack of accountability and failure to bring about meaningful democratic reform that characterize these regimes; 2. they are able to draw on deep repositories of social capital residing in a vast array of voluntary and charitable networks and organizations at the local and national levels; and 3. their reputational power as consistent critics of government injustice from within an Islamic framework is unrivaled, stretching back some 80 years.

It is precisely the issue of how Islam and, more specifically, the question of where Shari'a and the need for an Islamic state fit into the Brotherhood's political vision that have been chief sticking points for critics of the movement. The ideological current of the Muslim Brotherhood and its manifestation in the political activities of affiliated parties and groups throughout the Middle East (including the central body in Egypt) have undergone significant transformations in recent years. While a full accounting of this evolution is beyond the scope of this article, most scholars of political reform in the Middle East (along with many policy analysts) now take it as written that the Brotherhood movement has made a strategic commitment to democratic principles.³ While Islam is

still central to their political discourse, it serves primarily as a reference point for governing principles and legislation rather than as a separate and exclusivist model of government.

Even if it is recognized that mainstream, independent Islamists are likely to feature prominently in any sustainable political reform scenario, could there be a role for groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood in counter-terrorism and national security efforts? Aside from a number of abiding ambiguities surrounding the Brotherhood's embrace of pluralism and democracy, several key challenges relating more directly to security also need to be addressed. Many

"Islamist groups in the West need to emphasize unequivocally—and most already do—that the politics of confrontation must occur within the parameters of the law."

prominent Islamists such as Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, undoubtedly the leading intellectual figure within the contemporary Brotherhood movement, will continue to support Hamas and argue that what they take to be the group's armed resistance against Israeli occupation is justified, even as they simultaneously condemn the jihadist movement and work to put al-Qa`ida out of business. Furthermore, given the extremely broad and diverse nature of the Muslim Brotherhood as an ideological movement, there is little doubt that among their affiliates and sympathizers there are still figures who act as fundraisers and financiers to groups currently classified as terrorist entities. Such individuals, who should be pursued and treated as the criminals they are, represent a fringe minority within a movement whose core agenda has been undergoing significant transformation. To define the Brotherhood exclusively or primarily in terms of their activities

³ See, for example, Amr Hamzawy, *The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005); Carrie Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Isla-*

mist Parties in Jordan and Yemen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Ray Baker, *Islam Without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

would therefore be akin to throwing out an enormous baby with very little bathwater.⁴

Yet, what role could mainstream Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood and related groups actually play in the realm of counter-terrorism? In an important article in *Foreign Affairs*, Robert Leiken and Steven Brooke make the case that the Brotherhood is essentially moderate in its orientation and that its strategic agenda is today broadly in line with Western interests.⁵ Islamist groups in the Brotherhood mold already participate in democracy promotion and political party capacity-building activities in the Middle East and Southeast Asia funded through agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). That does not mean, however, that the United States and its allies should engage the Muslim Brotherhood because when it comes to cooperation on security issues, it is not entirely clear what a “partnership” would entail. What is envisaged, however, is a far more selective engagement with groups and figures with strong ties to Islamism but who, unlike the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, are less directly subject to political pressures from authoritarian regimes.

Engaging Islamist Groups Operating in the West

This is where Islamist-linked groups in Europe and North America begin to enter the picture in interesting ways, particularly in today’s climate of heightened concerns about “homegrown” terrorism. Yet how might Islamists be able to make a difference where other groups cannot? First, unlike many of the neophyte Muslim groups that have sprung out of the “war on terrorism,” Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-i-Islami linked groups in the West (such as the UK Islamic Mission, the Islamic Forum Europe, the Muslim Association of Britain, and, in the United States, the Muslim American Society), while

relatively small in terms of their active membership, have a stronger base of legitimacy and more experience than most Muslim groups when it comes to acting in the public sphere. Second, given the aversion within the younger generation of Western Muslims to joining groups in favor of independent voices and individualized approaches to religion, the idea is not to regard Islamists as providing an alternative

“Islamists need to resist the temptation today to turn inward in the name of defending the community.”

mass movement to jihadism. Rather, the division of labor that falls to Islamist-linked groups within Muslim public space in the West has more to do with framing issues and organizing events where these concerns are discussed and debated.

These are certainly not—nor should they be—forums designed to promote Western security goals, to encourage Muslims to passively assimilate, or to refrain from mobilizing politically around Islam. Indeed, much of the energy at such events is devoted to harsh criticism of Western foreign policy and counter-terrorism efforts; however, violence and subversive activity are not among the offered solutions. Rather, Islamist activists create a public sphere in which the compatibility between Islam and prevailing Western norms is not simply affirmed (as with secular-liberal Muslims) or rejected (as with radicals and extremists)—both of which are actually depoliticizing moves—but instead deliberated, contested and agonistically negotiated. For their part, however, Islamist groups in the West need to emphasize unequivocally—and most already do—that the politics of confrontation must occur within the parameters of the law. Finally, Islamist activists in the West generally have a much deeper and nuanced understanding of the “ecology”—both ideationally and in terms of social relations—in which radical and violent movements operate. In this regard, they are important interlocutors and sources of information for those in government

and civil society trying to understand the multiple and complex layers of Islamic radicalization. Some, such as the Centre for the Study of Terrorism in London, set up by long-time Muslim Brotherhood stalwart Kamal Helbawy, have begun to formulate their own approaches to counter-terrorism.

Conclusion

Although an active partnership between Islamists and counter-terrorism authorities is not necessary, it is important for counter-terrorism policy to recognize the nuances within the Muslim world. It is also important to understand that the very act of defining Muslim communities primarily in relation to security and terrorism hampers communication and contributes to tensions—meaning that it must be asked whether and when counter-terrorism is the proper framework for outreach and engagement. In turn, Islamists need to resist the temptation today to turn inward in the name of defending the community. When it comes to concerns about civil liberties around anti-terrorism legislation, the war in Iraq, environmental degradation, inequalities stemming from globalization and the rights of religious minorities, Muslims have the opportunity to forge relationships of solidarity with countless groups beyond the boundaries of their own community. Looking at each other with greater nuance and overcoming past mutual suspicions and the fact that they will continue to disagree on a range of issues, Islamists and counter-terrorism practitioners are likely to find a more common alignment of interests than perhaps either of them anticipated.

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4 This is precisely the error committed by journalists Mark Hosenball and Mike Isikoff in their profile of the Muslim Brotherhood for the 2007 PBS series, *America at a Crossroads*.

5 Robert S. Leiken and Steven Brooke, “The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood,” *Foreign Affairs* 86:2 (2007): pp. 107-121.

The Taliban Consolidate Control in Pakistan's Tribal Regions

By Muhammad Amir Rana

PAKISTAN'S LOCAL TALIBAN have consolidated their control over the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and are now extending their influence toward the settled districts of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). More than 50 Taliban affiliated groups are operating in FATA and its adjoining areas.¹ In the settled districts of the NWFP, 14 Taliban groups² are trying to strengthen their grip.³ The government's consecutive military operations and peace deals with the militants have not produced the desired results, and the writ of the state is weakening in the tribal areas. Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud, whose leadership qualities were once questioned by the Taliban supreme council,⁴ has recently not only won the confidence of Mullah Omar, but has emerged as the unanimous leader of the Taliban in Pakistan. His opponents—both outside and inside Taliban circles—fear his increasing influence and are too weak to oppose him. Even the FATA political administration and tribal elders cannot afford to deny his authority in North and South Waziristan. The same situation prevails in other agencies of FATA, where Baitullah Mehsud's allies are enjoying similar powers.

1 As many as 40 groups have joined Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) headed by Baitullah Mehsud. Other major groups/leaders still maintaining their independent integrity are Lashkar-i-Islami in Khyber Agency, Qari Gul Bahadar in North Waziristan, Maulvi Nazir in South Waziristan, Dr. Ismail's group in Bajaur Agency and local militants in Dara Adam Khel.

2 The statistics are based on data collected by the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) from field and media reports.

3 These groups are operating mainly in Mardan, Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan and Nowshera Districts of the NWFP. Most of these groups have joined the TTP. Groups in the settled areas of the NWFP are mainly formed by the different jihadist organizations and tribesmen who have roots in FATA.

4 After the assassination of Taliban leader Nek Muhammad in 2004, Baitullah took charge as operational commander, but the Taliban supreme council replaced him with Abdullah Mehsud. For details, see Muhammad Amir Rana and Rohan Gunaratna, *Al-Qaeda Fights Back: Inside Pakistani Tribal Areas* (Islamabad: PIPS, 2007).

It is clear that the Taliban movement is gaining strength, and unless the government attempts to exploit some of the movement's internal divisions, it is likely that the Taliban's influence will encroach further into the settled areas of the North-West Frontier Province.

Emergence of the Local Taliban

The situation in the tribal areas did not deteriorate overnight. During the past seven years, the Taliban have moved strategically to gain increasing control of the region. When al-Qa`ida and Taliban remnants slipped into Pakistan's tribal areas after the fall of Afghanistan's government in 2001, they already had logistics support bases set up in the form of *madaaris* (religious

“The ‘local’ Taliban are basically Pakistani militia groups that share ideological beliefs and goals with the former ruling Taliban regime in Afghanistan.”

schools), training camps and Islamic charity missions. They were also able to count on sympathies from the local population. To maintain control in these areas, they exploited these sympathies and distributed large sums of money to establish their networks. When the Pakistani government deployed the military into the region to stop their infiltration, al-Qa`ida and the Taliban supreme council encouraged Pakistan's local Taliban elements, with whom they had a long affiliation, to establish their militias.⁵ The “local” Taliban are basically Pakistani militia groups that share ideological beliefs and goals with the former ruling Taliban regime in Afghanistan; indeed, many of the former regime's leaders were themselves based in Pakistan before they took control of Afghanistan. Most of the local Taliban leaders—including Baitullah Mehsud, Maulvi Faqir, Gul Bahadur, Mullah Nazir, among others—were affiliated with the central Taliban leadership even before the September

11 attacks. Although each of these local Taliban groups have their own distinct structure and are independent in their respective areas of control, they are bound together by pooling financial and human resources.

This local support base—held together by tribal affinities and ideological associations—allows the Taliban leadership to entrench their movement into the masses and establish separate local Taliban cells, thus reducing the organizational burden on the central leadership and creating a strategic problem for the Pakistani military establishment since it is forced to target its “own” people. The Taliban encourage different tribes to form their own Taliban-affiliated militias. Initially, groups joining the Taliban were mostly from the Wazir sub-tribes, which made other tribes reluctant to join the Taliban ranks since they feared Wazir domination;⁶ the Taliban, however, changed their strategy and gave other tribes equal status.⁷ As a result, now most tribes in FATA have their own Taliban-affiliated militia.

Toward Talibanization

Until 2004, the main focus of the local Taliban was protecting foreign militants, recruitment for the war in Afghanistan, military training and counter-operations against the Pakistani government. Baitullah Mehsud began enforcing Taliban-brand Shari`a in South Waziristan in 2004. He punished criminals, which made him popular among common tribesmen who welcomed an enforcement mechanism. In his first peace deal with the government in February 2005,⁸ he received assurances that he would be allowed to enforce Shari`a in the area in exchange for not sending his militants to Afghanistan. Although he did not abide by the agreement, it helped the Taliban move forward to establish their influence. Other Taliban fighters followed the footsteps of Mehsud and formulated a four-point strategy to gain control over an area. During the first step of the strategy, they took action against

6 Rana and Gunaratna, *Al-Qaeda Fights Back: Inside Pakistani Tribal Areas*.

7 The Taliban now share responsibilities among tribes to give the impression that all groups are equal under the Taliban banner.

8 *Dawn*, February 22, 2005.

criminals and started collecting taxes through donations to speed up their operations. Second, they killed or forced out influential tribal elders, whom they knew could challenge their authority. Third, they created a parallel judicial system to resolve disputes, dispensing quick and decisive justice. Fourth, they organized their administration on a non-tribal basis; they appointed trusted men,⁹ irrespective of whether they belonged to a local tribe.¹⁰

Their strategy eroded the traditional concept of collective responsibility, which adversely affected the political administration. Other actors who could create ideological or tactical challenges for them were treated harshly, especially Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and formal and modern educational institutions. Today, these Taliban groups have imposed a ban on NGOs, have targeted electronics shops and attacked schools, especially female institutions. During

“Kidnappings are a major factor behind the ongoing peace talks between the government and the Taliban.”

January to May 2008, they attacked as many as 29 schools, of which 17 were educational institutes for girls.¹¹ From 2006 until February 2007, the Taliban killed 61 teachers,¹² and 25 local and foreign NGOs were forced to halt their operations and return to Islamabad.¹³ Twenty-four alleged U.S. and Pakistani government spies were killed during the past six months.¹⁴

9 Khalid Aziz, “Impact of 9/11 War on Tribal Society,” *The News*, June 1, 2008.

10 All of the area’s tribes are represented in the Taliban. The Taliban use tribal identity to motivate people, but in the administrative structure avoid emphasizing tribal connections as they consider these differences against the teachings of Islam.

11 This information is drawn from a PIPS database. The figures were collected from media reports.

12 Massoud Ansari, “‘Jihad’ Against Female Education,” *Newsline*, March 2007.

13 “Taliban Warned NGOs to Leave or Face Consequences,” *Daily Islam*, May 13, 2007.

14 This information is drawn from a PIPS database. The figures were collected from media reports.

These developments have allowed the Taliban to maintain influence in the tribal areas. The significant strategic victory that established them as major players in the region, however, occurred after they made a tactical change in their operations: they began kidnapping security and state officials. Although suicide attacks on security forces played a role in demoralizing security personnel, the kidnapping strategy elevated the Taliban into a position to negotiate with the government on their own terms and to foster the release of arrested militants. Independent sources estimate that the Taliban kidnapped more than 1,000 security force personnel and state officials during 2007, and in return more than 500 militants were released. Kidnappings are a major factor behind the ongoing peace talks between the government and the Taliban.

The Taliban’s Expanding Domain

As the Taliban’s confidence grows, they are expanding their territorial control. Today, they have established strongholds in Bajaur, Waziristan, Mohmand, Khyber and Orakzai Agencies in FATA, and in Swat, Dara Adam Khel, Tank, Bannu, Mardan, Lakki Marwat and Dera Ismail Khan in the NWFP.

Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have provided shelter to small groups, which are working under the command of Baitullah Mehsud.¹⁵ Mehsud is trying to bond all of these groups under the loyalty of Mullah Omar, the Taliban’s supreme leader. Every group that wants to join the TTP must take an oath of commitment to Shari’a enforcement and loyalty to Mullah Omar.¹⁶ Through this arrangement, Mehsud wins the favor of the Taliban supreme council on the one hand, and on the other hand establishes his credibility, making it difficult for groups to resist his leadership. His strategy so far has been successful; he is generating revenues in addition to human resources, the latter of which he is using to support the insurgency in Afghanistan.

The TTP has imposed conditions on all its affiliated groups to contribute

50% of their income (through taxes and donations) to a major “jihad fund.” The fund is used to sustain Taliban activities in the tribal areas and in Afghanistan.¹⁷ According to anonymous sources based in South Waziristan, these small groups, which are mostly operating in Mohmand, Orakzai, Tank, Bannu and other settled areas, are becoming involved in criminal activities—especially ransoms, and taxing transport and trade—to achieve

“As the Taliban’s confidence grows, they are expanding their territorial control.”

their financial goals. These same sources claimed that these groups also kidnap and ransom unpopular wealthy tribal elders and businessmen.

Threat of Infighting

Although Baitullah has emerged as a powerful Taliban leader, many other local Taliban groups have still not joined the TTP, especially Lashkar-i-Islami in Khyber, Mullah Nazir’s tribal militia in South Waziristan and Gul Bahadar’s militia in North Waziristan.

The TTP is trying to bring these groups into its fold and is also threatening them of the consequences of refusal. They are particularly interested in Khyber Agency, which is a resourceful area for generating funds and is where Mangal Bagh, the leader of Lashkar-i-Islami, has been strengthening his position and wants to expand his network and influence to all of Khyber and the border areas, such as Hangu District and Orakzai Agency. Anonymous sources claim that the TTP assigned Haji Namdar, the chief of *Amr bil Maroof wa Nahi Anil Munkar* (Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) from Orakzai Agency to start a campaign to achieve control over the area. To respond to this threat, Mangal Bagh sent a suicide bomber to kill Haji Namdar, but Namdar

15 For more on Tehrik-i-Taliban, see Hassan Abbas, “A Profile of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan,” *CTC Sentinel* 1:2 (2008).

16 This information is drawn from interviews of sources in the tribal areas.

17 NWFP Governor Owais Ahmad Ghani claims that Baitullah is spending around three billion rupees annually on procuring weapons, equipment, vehicles, treating wounded militants and supporting the families of killed militants. See *Daily Times*, May 30, 2008.

escaped.¹⁸ Local sources also argue that if the TTP fails to consolidate control over competing factions, this will encourage other small groups to revolt against it.

Although the Taliban are rapidly increasing control in Pakistan's tribal areas, it may be the ideal time to exacerbate the group's internal divisions to defuse or at least weaken their rising power and influence. The government, however, does not look serious in exploiting these rifts and is instead focusing on the strategy of peace deals, which may benefit the Taliban more since these deals allow them to gain guarantees for Shari'a enforcement and for the continuation of the jihad in Afghanistan.

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The Demise of the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Southern Philippines

By Zachary Abuza

SINCE LAUNCHING A major offensive against the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in August 2006, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have dealt the group a number of crippling blows. While members of the ASG are still at large, the frequency and lethality of their attacks have dropped precipitously since the first quarter of 2007, when several top commanders were killed. The ASG lack any semblance of central leadership at this point. Indeed, their continued existence seems to be more due to the AFP's failings than to any concerted effort to regroup. Moreover, the ASG appears short on financial resources and has reverted back to spates of kidnappings for ransom, effectively jettisoning what little ideological pretensions the group ever had.

Background

Formed in 1991 by a veteran of the Afghan jihad, Abdurrajak Janjalani, the ASG developed as a small-scale terrorist organization committed to establishing an Islamic state in the Sulu archipelago.¹ Yet, unlike the larger Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the ASG was decidedly sectarian in its killings. The group attacked churches and kidnapped or killed Christian priests or missionaries. By 1996-1998, the group had been seriously degraded with the loss of their al-Qa`ida funding and the death of their leader, Abdurrajak. From 1996-2002, the Abu Sayyaf were no more than a group of well-armed kidnappers, driven by profit rather than ideological fervor. Although they gained international notoriety in 2000-2001 with several high-profile raids and large-scale kidnappings on Philippine and Malaysian dive resorts, they remained a criminal threat. The 2001 hostage taking of an American missionary couple and the beheading of another American citizen were the *casus belli* for the U.S. intervention in the southern Philippines. Since then, U.S.

Special Forces have rotated in and out of the southern Philippines where they provide training and intelligence for their AFP counterparts.

The capture and killing of several ASG leaders in 2002 actually had a backlash: Janjalani's younger brother, Khadaffy, consolidated a degree of power and re-oriented the group back toward its ideological principles. At the same time, the members of the Indonesian-dominated terrorist organization,

"Fleeing the authorities and short of funds, the ASG is a diminished terrorist threat."

Jemaah Islamiyah, based in MILF camps, established ties with the ASG. By 2003, all kidnappings had ceased, and starting in 2004 the ASG and JI had begun a new wave of terrorist bombings from Mindanao to Manila, prompting several offensives by government forces. An AFP bombing of a MILF safe house in the Liguasan Marsh where several ASG and JI members were holed up prompted the MILF to oust them.² By January 2005, top JI members Dulmatin and Umar Patek were based with the ASG in Jolo.

Operation Ultimatum began in August 2006 and continues to this day, although the real operational tempo diminished by mid-2007. U.S. military advisors and analysts were surprised that the AFP was able to maintain the offensive on Jolo Island for as long as they did. In all, eight battalions of AFP and Philippine Marines were deployed. Five years of U.S. training and assistance began to bear fruit and for the first time joint inter-service operations were showing real gains. In September 2006 and March 2007, two top leaders, Khadaffy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman, were killed.³ Since then, the ASG has fallen into a tail spin.

² "Istiada Bte Oemar Sovie Interview," Philippine National Police, November 9, 2006.

³ Zachary Abuza, "On the Defensive: Rebels Lose Ground in the Southern Philippines," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, April 1, 2007.

¹⁸ "Khyber Agency, Suicide Attack in Mosque, 3 Killed, 18 Injured," *Daily Jang*, May 2, 2008.

¹ For more, see Zachary Abuza, "Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf," Strategic Studies Institute Monograph, September 1, 2005.

Current State of the ASG

While a handful of press reports⁴ and analysts⁵ asserted that the ASG had appointed the Middle East-trained Yasser Igasan as their new leader, there was no evidence to support this claim. Igasan had been in Saudi Arabia since 2001 studying religion and fundraising for Moro causes. An April 2008 press report from the Philippines later denied that Igasan had become the group's new chieftain, and Philippine security officials acknowledged that the ASG "haven't been able to come up with a single, influential leader who can unite the different factions."⁶ Some of the remaining ASG leaders still at large include:

- Isnlon Toton Hapilon, alias Salahuddin or Abu Mus'ab
- Radullan Sahiron, alias Kumander Putol
- Umbra Abu Jumdail, alias Dr. Abu Pula
- Albader Parad
- Osman, alias Usman or Rizal
- Gumbahali Jumdail
- Ustadz Hatta Haipie
- Tahil Sali
- Abu Sofian
- Suhod Tanadjalan, alias Kumander Suhod

The AFP asserted that Isnlon Hapilon was wounded in late April in a battle that killed his son.⁷ Hapilon, who has a bounty from the U.S. government of up to \$5 million, remains one of the leading figures of the movement. Although Radullan Sahiron remains at large, at 71-years-old and missing a limb the AFP no longer see him as an active leader. Umbra Abu Jumdail (Abu Pula) remains the second-most wanted figure, although Albader Parad is often described as the group's most violent and dangerous commander. What is clear is that there are distinct factions, and the ASG in no sense is a cohesive organization.

Fleeing the authorities and short of funds, the ASG is a diminished terrorist threat. In September 2007, an

ASG operative was arrested en route to Manila where he was ordered to stage diversionary attacks. The most spectacular attack in the past year was the November 13, 2007 bombing-cum-assassination of Basilan Congressman Wahab Akbar, a former member of the ASG who had become an outspoken opponent against them.⁸ In February 2008, two suspected ASG operatives were arrested in Davao Oriental with

“What is more troubling is that clashes with the ASG on Basilan, which had been clear of the ASG for several years, are now drawing the AFP into battles with the MILF.”

an Indonesian JI member, Baihaqi. On March 1, a homemade bomb ripped through a bar near an army base on Jolo, wounding six people. In mid-April, two bombs fashioned from 60-millimeter and 81-millimeter mortar shells were detonated outside of a Catholic cathedral and cafe in Zamboanga, although no one was injured.⁹ That same month, police arrested an ASG operative in Quezon City, Alpaker Said (Abu Jandal), and charged him with the attack on Wahab Akbar. Police believed he was planning a new series of attacks.¹⁰ There were many other small bombings in central Mindanao in late 2007 and early 2008, but most have been attributed to hard line elements of the MILF or the al-Khobar extortion gang, not the ASG.¹¹ Nonetheless, the ASG is still able to perpetrate lethal attacks, such as the May 29 bombing of an Air Force

facility in Zamboanga that killed three and wounded 18.¹² What is all the more remarkable is that due to being constantly on the run, the ASG has been unable to leverage the technical bomb-making expertise of two JI operatives implicated in the 2002 Bali bombing—Dulmatin and Umar Patek—who have been with the ASG since early 2005.

The AFP has engaged the ASG in a small number of fierce encounters. Two police were killed in Jolo in January 2008. At the end of that month, a pitched battle in Tawi-Tawi led to the death of Wahab Opao, as well as reports that JI operative Dulmatin was killed.¹³ Although a body was later exhumed and DNA tested, U.S. officials have failed to conclude whether the body was in fact Dulmatin's. Between February and April, nearly 10 soldiers and marines were killed in clashes on Jolo. What is more troubling is that clashes with the ASG on Basilan, which had been clear of the ASG for several years, are now drawing the AFP into battles with the MILF, who maintain a camp in Tipo-Tipo. In July 2007, 14 AFP were killed, 10 of whom were beheaded, when the ASG sought refuge in the MILF camp.¹⁴ While the MILF admitted to killing the AFP in self-defense, they denied that they were fighting alongside the ASG, giving them sanctuary or that they had beheaded the troops.¹⁵ On May 25, fighting again broke out between government forces and MILF and ASG combatants in Basilan, leaving six AFP dead. Again, the MILF denied any ASG presence.¹⁶

Re-Degeneration: Return to Kidnappings

Perhaps the most telling sign of the ASG's current state is their degeneration to kidnappings. While there were a number of incidences in 2007, the tempo has increased in the first half of 2008 and money has become the primary motive. In mid-January, a Roman Catholic priest was killed in a botched kidnapping, while a teacher from the

4 Jim Gomez, "Militant May Lead Philippine Terrorists," Associated Press, March 3, 2007.

5 See, for example, Taharudin Piang Ampatuan, "Abu Sayaf's New Leader: Yasser Igasan The Religious Scholar," RSIS Commentaries, July 9, 2007.

6 "Abu Sayyaf Hit by Leadership, Funding Woes," Associated Press, April 4, 2008.

7 Joel Guinto, "Abu Sayyaf Leader Hapilon, Son Wounded—Military," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 1, 2008.

8 Three others were killed and 12 wounded at the attack on the congress. See "Rep. Wahab Akbar, 2 Others Killed in Batasan Bomb Blast," GMA News.tv, November 14, 2007; Samira A. Gutoc, "From Sandals to Suits: Wahab Akbar, the Rebel Turned Politician," *MindaNews.com*, November 15, 2007.

9 "Suspected al-Qaida Militants Bomb Cathedral, Bank in Zamboanga," *Sun Star*, April 13, 2008.

10 Joel Guinto, "Informant vs Abu Sayyaf Suspect Gets P500,000 Reward," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 28, 2008.

11 For more on al-Khobar, see Zachary Abuza, "Criminal Gangs in the Southern Philippines," *Jane's Intelligence Digest*, April 10, 2008.

12 "Bomb Kills Three Outside Philippine Air Base: Military," Agence France-Presse, May 29, 2008.

13 "Dulmatin Died in May '07, Says Indon Prof," ABS-CBN News, February 21, 2008.

14 "Militants Kill 14 Philippine Marines; Behead 10," Agence France-Presse, July 11, 2007.

15 Joel Guinto, "AFP Files Protest vs MILF over Basilan Attack," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 26, 2008.

16 Ibid.

parochial school was taken hostage. The teacher was released in late March after his family paid a 200,000 peso (\$4,880) ransom. In March, a South Korean and Filipino were abducted. In early April, ASG members kidnapped a Department of Education official and several teachers. On April 10, ASG gunmen released seven persons they abducted separately. On May 28, a Filipino businessman in Zamboanga was abducted.¹⁷ In all of these cases, the captives were released after ransoms were paid, suggesting that the ASG is short of funds.

What concerns Philippine officials most about the trend is that the ASG seem to be planning a new wave of high profile kidnappings of tourists. On March 13, a suspected Indonesian member of JI and ASG member were arrested on the resort island of Boracay, where authorities assert they were “casing” hotels and bars.¹⁸ Most recently, on June 8 Ces Drilon, a popular senior reporter for ABS-CBN, was kidnapped by suspected ASG militants; a ransom is being demanded for her release.¹⁹

How Does the ASG Survive?

Into the eighth year of U.S. training and hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid, not to mention the bulk of USAID funding being concentrated in Sulu and Mindanao, why have the ASG not been finished off? The current order of battle only puts them at 300-400 people. Although the terrain is very rugged, the AFP has considerable intelligence being provided from the United States. People in Jolo, at first resistant to the American presence, have been more receptive due to the civic action and medical missions being conducted. More intelligence is coming from tips from the local community who are increasingly tired of the ASG's nihilism. Moreover, the United States has provided more than \$10 million since 2001 for information leading to arrests of ASG members.²⁰

Part of the problem is that the operational tempo of the AFP is down considerably from 2007, when 127 ASG were killed and 38 captured.²¹ The AFP has a tendency to not hold on to territory it has captured. In mid-April 2008, the Philippine Army disregarded the ASG as a threat and withdrew a large number of their forces from Jolo, leaving the bulk of operations with the marines.

A more cynical answer is that the AFP has little intention of finishing the job since that would end the pipeline of U.S. training and military assistance, which would force the funds allocated by the government in Manila to actually make it down to front-line troops. The

“What concerns Philippine officials most about the trend is that the ASG seem to be planning a new wave of high-profile kidnappings of tourists.”

campaign against institutionalized corruption in the AFP has not been as impressive. As the recent State Department report on terrorism noted, “Limited financial resources, inadequate salaries, corruption, low morale, limited cooperation between police and prosecutors, and other problems in law enforcement have hampered bringing terrorists to justice.”²²

Yet, the ASG is also the beneficiary of a government that has never tried to establish a holistic solution for its Moro troubles, instead killing operatives as they appear and implementing a divide and conquer policy toward the three disparate rebel groups. In March 2007, MNLF commanders in Jolo and Zamboanga quit the peace process and attacked government forces. Habier Malik joined up with the ASG in Jolo, in effect doubling their size, because the government had failed to implement the 1996 Tripoli Accords or attend the Tripartite Talks with the Organization

of the Islamic Conference.²³ The government at first refused to attend the talks, citing the ongoing peace process with the MILF, and since then has attended but been non-committal. The parallel set of peace talks with the MILF has stalled since the November 2007 breakthrough on the issue of ancestral domain. In the end, the AFP and hardliners in the government have refused to endorse what government negotiators agreed on. Malaysia has since begun withdrawing their peacekeepers from Mindanao, and cease-fire violations are increasing.²⁴ Frustration on the part of all the various Moro ethnic groups is palpable, and few have any faith that the government ever negotiates in sincerity.

While all three groups have failed to develop a common program or platform, at the tactical level of autonomous field commanders, there is considerable cooperation. Although this has helped keep the ASG alive, they are clearly a diminished threat.

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17 Al Jacinto, “Businessman Abducted in Zamboanga – Reports,” GMA News.tv, May 27, 2008.

18 “Bali Bombing Suspect Held in Boracay resort,” *Gulf News*, March 27, 2008.

19 “TV News Reporter, Crew Missing in Philippines,” CNN, June 11, 2008.

20 Angelo L. Gutierrez, “US Spent Over \$10M for Filipino Tipsters vs Islamic Militants,” ABS-CBN, May 5, 2008.

21 This data was provided in the State Department's 2007 Philippine Country Report.

22 Ibid.

23 “AFP Bares P1-M Bounty for Malik, Junks Ceasefire Call,” ABS-CBN, April 18, 2008.

24 Sean Yoong, “Malaysia Blames RP for Stalled Peace Talks,” Associated Press, May 3, 2008.

When to Confront Mahdists: A Challenge for the U.S. Military

By Reidar Visser

ONE OF THE MOST extraordinary uses of U.S. air power in Iraq took place on January 18 and 19, 2008, when Iraqi forces involved in armed confrontations in Basra and Nasiriyya called in air support and U.S. jets flew over the battlefields in a show of support. In itself, this kind of action may seem unremarkable; however, the identity of the group targeted by the Iraqi forces raises important questions about the type of “anti-terrorism” operations into which U.S. forces in Iraq are getting drawn. In this case, the focus of the offensive was a group whose ideology sets it apart from followers of mainstream Shi’ism primarily because it believes the Hidden Imam—the Shi’a leader who disappeared in 874 AD but who theoretically still holds all power among the Shi’a—may be about to appear.¹

This was not the first time U.S. forces have backed up the Nuri al-Maliki government against internal enemies who subscribe to unorthodox interpretations of Shi’a Islam. One year earlier, in January 2007, a similar group had been targeted in the Najaf area. In this prior confrontation, hundreds of people lost their lives and scores were arrested. The Iraqi government accused the “cult members” involved—also known as Jund al-Sama’ or the “Soldiers of Heaven”—of having planned an attack on Najaf in which leading members of the clergy would be liquidated. Independent researchers familiar with the (still undisclosed) court records of the subsequent trial against the group, however, dismiss it as a farcical attempt to implicate political enemies in criminal activity. Once more, the group singled out by the Iraqi government was characterized by messianic beliefs related to the return of the Hidden Imam, the Mahdi.²

It is likely that the Iraqi government will make similar requests for military assistance in the future. Before taking action against discontented Shi’a, however, the U.S. armed forces should assess the relevant theological issues and whether actual security risks are involved.

The Background of the Ahmad al-Hasan Movement

Soon after the 2008 incident, the two Mahdist groups became mixed up in the Western media. There is, however, reason to believe that the cells that were targeted in 2008 had developed quite independently of the Najaf group. Styling themselves as “followers of Ahmad al-Hasan al-Yamani,” the group had a visible presence in Basra since at

“This was not the first time U.S. forces have backed up the Nuri al-Maliki government against internal enemies who subscribe to unorthodox interpretations of Shi’a Islam.”

least 2005.³ In the subsequent period it remained active in Basra and the far south, gaining adherents among former Sadrist and religious students, especially in Basra and Nasiriyya. In the wake of the 2007 clash in Najaf, the group vigorously distanced itself from the Jund al-Sama’ group, claiming they disagreed over interpretations of how and when the Hidden Imam would reappear.⁴

In a statement dating from around January 19, 2008, which was accessible for a few hours on the group’s website, www.almahdyyoon.org, before it was closed down, the followers of Ahmad al-Hasan gave their side of the story behind the confrontation with the Iraqi

government.⁵ In it, they deplore the accusations by government sources of links to the Jund al-Sama’ movement and former Ba’athists. They present their movement as essentially a fundamentalist Shi’a one, critical of the *ulama*, but focusing on a “return to the sources,” “the holy books [the Qur’an], the traditions of the Prophet and the ‘heritage’ (*turath*) of the Shiites.” Their aim is to prepare for the return of the Mahdi, “which has been promised both in Islam, Christianity and Judaism.” As an example of comparable *haraka islamiyya* (reformist movements), they draw attention to the Jehovah’s Witnesses in the West. It is noteworthy that in this declaration they play down another theme that had been prominent in previous public pronouncements: the supposed imminence of the return of the Mahdi, and the concomitant claims to a special, divine role for their leader, Ahmad al-Hasan, as the “guardian” of the Mahdi.⁶

As for the accusations of targeting the *ulama*, the group members admit that they do not support the higher clergy among the Shi’a, but at the same time they offer a theoretically grounded explanation for this. In their view, the standard Shi’a practice of total surrender to a qualified cleric (*mujtahid*) in questions of Islamic law is misguided. “Emulating a cleric” (*taqlid*), they say, is not *wajib* (obligatory), and the payment of religious taxes to anyone other than the infallible imams (of whom only the twelfth and hidden one is still alive) would be wrong. According to the group, rather than consulting the *ulama*, the people should read the Qur’an for themselves in order to “find out about the truth.” They ask: “Is this really deviation (*inhiraf*)?” The real reason for them being targeted, in their view, is political, and they single out ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Hakim of the Islamic Supreme Council for Iraq for having instigated the dispatch of a special force from Baghdad to the south to have them arrested.

The rhetoric of the followers of Ahmad al-Hasan clarifies why the leading Shi’a *ulama* may consider them a threat.

1 “Iraqi Troops Battle Messianic Cult in Southern Iraq, At Least 68 Killed,” Associated Press, January 19, 2008.

2 Ali Allawi, “Millenarianism, Mahdism and Terrorism: The Case of Iraq,” presentation at The Jamestown Foundation, October 9, 2007.

3 An early, peaceful demonstration by this group was covered by *al-Manara* on August 2, 2005.

4 Reidar Visser, “Ashura in Iraq: Enter Mahdism?” January 29, 2007, available at www.historiae.org/mahdism.asp.

5 Undated statement from www.almahdyyoon.org.

6 The more assertive position is described for instance in a statement by Ahmad al-Hasan dated 21 Rabi al-Thani 1426/May 30, 2005, published on www.almahdyyoon.org.

The very fundament of power of the Shi'a *ulama* is the dichotomy present in Usuli Shi'ism (the main, orthodox branch of Shi'ism) which divides all Shi'a into two categories: a tiny elite of clerics qualified to interpret the Islamic law (*mujtahidun*), and the vast majority of people unqualified in jurisprudential matters, called *muqallids* because they have to "emulate" a *mujtahid*. This dichotomy crystallized in the 18th century and has since proven remarkably durable. Any ideas about "people going back to the sources themselves" (sometimes described as "neo-Akhbarism," after the Akhbari school which originally was the main enemy of the Usulis) are seen as a direct challenge to it; it could potentially lead to conditions such as those seen in Sunni Islam, where the established clergy lost control completely in the late 19th and 20th centuries when a similar "back to the sources" trend became ascendant.

Historical Parallels

The clearest historical parallel to what is currently going on inside Iraq's Shi'a community can be found in the situation in Iraq's holy cities in the mid-19th century. In that period, numerous similar challenges against the monopoly of the Usuli Shi'a clergy were launched: Shaykhism, Babism and Baha'ism. History shows that there were hardly any limits to what the orthodox *ulama* would do to fend off these challenges. For example, in the 1820s, in an attempt to have the founder of the Shaykhi school (Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, who claimed to have access to the Hidden Imam) executed or deported, Shi'a *ulama* contacted the Sunni authorities in Baghdad, alleging that the Shaykhi leader was guilty of having cursed the three first caliphs (a common Shi'a practice).⁷ Similarly, in 1846, when the Babi movement emerged (and its leader presented claims to have privileged access to the Mahdi as a "gate" or *bab*, not entirely unlike the "guardian" role claimed by Ahmad al-Hasan), Najaf *ulama* showed no hesitancy in facilitating his arrest and handing him over to Ottoman authorities in Baghdad with a demand for the death penalty.⁸

7 Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The Ulama of Najaf and Karbala* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 59.

8 Ibid., pp. 144-46.

One competing interpretation of the appearance of Mahdist groups in contemporary Iraq that should be rejected immediately is that of an "Iranian conspiracy." It is true that there are interesting parallels between the stronger emphasis on Mahdism in both countries in recent years. Yet, to see Iranian hands behind groups like Ahmad al-Hasan would be a mistake in two ways. In the first place, many of his followers come from some of the most anti-Iranian circles in Shi'a Iraq, and Hasan himself has attacked Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, much in the way he has attacked Grand Ayatollah Ali al-

"The fundamental question today is what purpose the U.S. armed forces are serving by volunteering to adjudicate on these rivalries in the name of the 'war on terrorism.'"

Sistani, and has specifically called for his abdication.⁹ Second, this would overlook the considerable historical roots of Mahdism in the far south of Iraq. Similar movements have mushroomed in the south and the adjacent areas in Iran and the Arabian Peninsula for centuries, starting with revolutionary movements and slave revolts in the early centuries of Islam, followed by the emergence of Mahdist principalities such as the Mushasha dynasty in the Iranian-Iraqi borderlands in the 15th century, and culminating with the triad of Shaykhism, Babism and Baha'ism in the 19th century—the first of which had its roots in the Shi'a areas of al-Hasa (in the eastern parts of modern-day Saudi Arabia) and later gave birth to a substantial Shaykhi community in Basra that still exists today.¹⁰

9 "Call Number Two," undated message posted on a now defunct website.

10 Sami al-Badri, *Shubhat wa-rudud* (Qom: al-Matba'a al-Shari'a, 2000), p. 543; Reidar Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State: Separatism and Nationalism in Southern Iraq* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2005), pp. 27–30.

Challenges for the U.S. Armed Forces

The fundamental question today is what purpose the U.S. armed forces are serving by volunteering to adjudicate on these rivalries in the name of the "war on terrorism." The historical parallels suggest that this is first and foremost a theological dispute about the timing of the return of the Mahdi in which the stronger party (the Iraqi government, under pressure to be seen as the upholder of orthodox Shi'ism and desperately trying to reach out to the higher-ranking clergy of Najaf) concocts inflated terrorism-related charges against a possible threat to the monopoly of the established clergy.

Just as the Shi'a *ulama* in the 19th century quite unscrupulously called on the Ottoman state to deal with Shi'a dissenters by appealing to a language the Ottomans would understand (that of Sunni orthodoxy), the Iraqi government seems to have no qualms in enlisting U.S. support for combating Shi'a who dare challenge the orthodox mainstream, again using language that would be familiar to the military power whose services are sought (terrorism, or al-Qa'ida involvement). Details about the recent operations against Iraqi Mahdists remain sketchy, but the timing (in both cases during the Shi'a holy month of Muharram) strongly suggests that this was primarily an attempt by Shi'a leaders to enforce sectarian orthodoxy during testing times. If similar requests for U.S. military help should materialize in the future—and reports out of Iraq suggest that there is no shortage of discontented Shi'a prepared to explore the Mahdist option—it would be prudent for the U.S. armed forces to sort out theological and security-related issues before the label of "terrorism" is taken at face value.

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Constructing Takfir: From `Abdullah `Azzam to Djamel Zitouni

By Shane Drennan

ON APRIL 2, 2008, jihadist websites posted an “open interview” with Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri wherein the al-Qa`ida leader fielded a number of often hostile questions. The first, and arguably the most important, concerned al-Qa`ida’s invocation of *takfir* (excommunicating or declaring a Muslim an apostate, which is punishable by death):

Excuse me, Mr. Zawahiri, but who is it who is killing with Your Excellency’s blessing the innocents in Baghdad, Morocco and Algeria? Do you consider the killing of women and children to be Jihad?...Why have you—to this day—not carried out any strike in Israel? Or is it easier to kill Muslims in the markets?¹

This article explores the correlation between religious training and the construction of the definition of *takfir* for leaders of Salafi-jihadi movements.² This is established using four cases of contemporary Salafi-jihadi leaders: `Abdullah `Azzam, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi and Djamel Zitouni. For each case, the individual’s level and type of religious training and his most recent definition of *takfir* are outlined and analyzed.³ Overall, the evidence suggests that the less religiosity a jihadist leader has gained via formal training, personal piety, and/or the duration of his adherence to Salafist Islam, the more likely he is to

accept *takfir* as necessary and the broader he is able to construct his definition of *takfir*.

Dr. `Abdullah `Azzam

`Abdullah `Azzam is considered to be the godfather of the Afghan jihad. His writings calling for the unification of the umma through defensive jihad, and his *Maktab al-Khidmat* (Services Bureau), created the organizational archetype for the current manifestation of the global Salafi-jihad and al-Qa`ida specifically. Although `Azzam’s Salafi-jihadi ideology was considered radical by most academics, his eschatological grounding made him relatively moderate compared to many of the jihadists⁴ who answered his invitation to Afghanistan,⁵ especially regarding *takfir*.

Religious Training

`Azzam enveloped himself in Islam and Shari`a throughout his entire life. Even as a child he was considered “serious” and “pious.”⁶ His higher education focus was Shari`a, earning a bachelor’s⁷ and a master’s degree⁸ in Shari`a from Shari`a College at Damascus University, and a Ph.D. in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) from the renowned al-Azhar University in Cairo.⁹ His level of scholarly authority is rare among Salafi-jihadis, especially those directly engaged in physical warfare.¹⁰

`Azzam continued to self-reinforce his radical Salafist views as a lecturer. He taught at the University of Jordan in Amman and lectured at Abdul Aziz University in Saudi Arabia where

he eschewed a radical interpretation of Islam and jihad.¹¹ While in the training camps of Afghanistan, `Azzam interacted with jihadist leaders from around the globe as he continued espousing his messages of defense and resistance. It was in this context that he produced his two most famous works on jihad: *Defence of Muslim Lands* and *Join the Caravan*.

Definition of Takfir

`Azzam did not excommunicate Muslims. For him, defending Muslim lands from invasion by *kuffar* (infidels or nonbelievers) and uniting the umma

“A lack of formal religious training will likely lead a Salafi-jihadi leader to accept takfir as a valid and necessary doctrinal component...the less religious training a jihadist leader has, the greater his proclivity to excommunicate and kill more categories of Muslims.”

was paramount, and *takfir* only served to create *fitna* (division). His opinion of *takfiri* jihadists suggests that a deficiency in formal training in Shari`a may result in expansive violence through incorrect or incomplete understandings of Islam: “They, because of their lack of knowledge, are simply youth with much zeal, and the hearts of these youth were made to follow their desires.”¹² `Azzam’s Islamic training even trumped political pressures of infighting among the mujahidin in Afghanistan,¹³ essentially deriving an order of combat precedence from the scriptures placing jihad against occupiers over reforming those led astray from Islam.¹⁴

1 Ayman al-Zawahiri, “The Open Meeting with Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri,” al-Sahab, April 2, 2008.

2 This article does not analyze the practical application of *takfir* by these individuals or their lieutenants. In practice, *takfir* often varies from the definition created by the leader of an organization.

3 The most recent definition was chosen because such concepts are epistemologically constructed, resulting in definitional variations throughout one’s lifetime. For example, Kant discusses the construction of concepts through experience and the reconstruction of those concepts once they are applied outside of the previous limits of experience. For a full explanation of the construction of language and definitions, see Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

4 See, for example, `Abdullah `Azzam, *Fi Dhilal Surat at-Tawbah* (place, publisher and date unknown). Also see Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 130.

5 For further commentary on how misunderstandings of Islam lead to extremist views, see Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Islamic Awakening: Between Rejection and Extremism* (Washington, D.C.: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991).

6 `Abdullah `Azzam, *Defence of Muslim Lands* (place, publisher and date unknown).

7 Andrew McGregor, “Jihad and the Rifle Alone: ‘Abdullah `Azzam and the Islamist Revolution,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 23:2 (2003): pp. 92-113.

8 `Azzam, *Defence of Muslim Lands*.

9 McGregor, “Jihad and the Rifle Alone: ‘Abdullah `Azzam and the Islamist Revolution,” pp. 92-113.

10 While a number of Salafist scholars with credentials similar to `Azzam advocate jihad, none have physically taken up arms themselves.

11 Peter Bergen, *Holy War Inc.* (New York: Free Press, 2001), p. 50, p. 55.

12 `Azzam, *Fi Dhilal Surat at-Tawbah*.

13 Wright, *The Looming Tower*, pp. 131-137.

14 See `Azzam’s response to the question “Do we fight alongside Muslims that are below acceptable levels of Is-

Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri

Ayman al-Zawahiri, commonly referred to as al-Qa`ida's second-in-command, is one of the most influential leaders of the current Salafi-jihadi movement. He has issued numerous communiqués concerning every front of the global Salafi-jihad and has campaigned to unify Salafi-jihadi movements worldwide under the banner of al-Qa`ida.¹⁵ Recently, al-Zawahiri's authority has come under attack for al-Qa`ida's expansive invocation of *takfir*.¹⁶

Religious Training

Having no collegiate level religious training, al-Zawahiri's understanding of Islam is derived mostly from the religiosity of his upbringing (much of which was self-induced) and the ideas propagated within Islamist and jihadist organizations in which he has been involved. Al-Zawahiri was raised in a strict Muslim family in Egypt where he attended all of the daily prayers at the local mosque. His adolescence was devoted to Islamic self-studies, especially concerning *fiqh* and Qur'anic interpretation.¹⁷ Throughout his education, he was not openly involved in Islamist organizations; however, al-Zawahiri confessed to being a founder and active member of a militant Islamist cell with a violent *takfiri* bent as a teen¹⁸ and maintained a covert affiliation with similar groups thereafter.

Several Islamists and jihadists informed al-Zawahiri's interpretation of Islam and Shari'a. Al-Zawahiri became interested in the ideas of Sayyid Qutb as an adolescent and attributes much of his ideological development to Qutb's writings.¹⁹ Typical of Salafi-jihadis,

al-Zawahiri also often references Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathir to give his writings a sense of timeless jurisprudence.²⁰ Since 1986, al-Zawahiri has been undoubtedly influenced by other radical Salafi-jihadi ideologues (mostly within al-Qa`ida's ranks) beginning with Sayyid Imam (Dr. Fadl) and Dr. Ahmed el-Wed.²¹ His knowledge of historic Islamic rulings suggests that al-Zawahiri has a good comprehension of *fiqh* through personal studies, although his neo-scripturalist hermeneutic approach has likely been prejudiced by his combat surroundings.

Definition of Takfir

Al-Zawahiri embraces *takfir*, but maintains a relatively selective definition of it. He views the governments ruling over Muslim lands to be illegitimate and apostate, to include civilian government employees, security forces²² and any persons collaborating or engaging with those entities.²³ This is likely derived from his personal historical hatred for and experiences with the Egyptian regime rather than an objective analysis of the situation through the guidelines of *fiqh*. He also declared that an organization, Islamist or not, which participates in the political process is a transgressor,²⁴ again derived from personal differences with the Muslim Brotherhood rather than an educated hermeneutic ruling. Al-Zawahiri accepts a great deal of collateral damage in the form of "innocents," stating, "we don't kill innocents: in fact, we fight those who kill innocents...it may be the case that during [targeting enemies], an innocent might fall unintentionally

or unavoidably."²⁵ Lastly, he considers all Shi'a apostate and pejoratively describes Shi'a Islam as "a religious school based on excess and falsehood" that has cooperated with the enemies of Islam throughout history.²⁶ Although al-Zawahiri does consider a great number of Muslims apostate, he is nevertheless selective in his definition of *takfir* compared to many jihadist leaders less familiar (although for al-Zawahiri familiarity was gained informally) with the nuances of Islam, Shari'a and *fiqh*.

Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi

Although Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi was killed by U.S. forces in 2006, he remains one of the most popular jihadist figures in contemporary history. During his few years in Iraq, he amassed a force capable of controlling cities,²⁷ engineered a sectarian clash that threatened a full-scale civil war²⁸ and waged murder and intimidation campaigns that continue today. He is hated by most Iraqis and is celebrated as a hero by much of the Salafi-jihadi community.²⁹ Yet, for his fame, al-Zarqawi had one of the most latitudinal and controversial definitions of *takfir*.

Religious Training

For the first 21 years of his life, al-Zarqawi was nearly antithetical to his later jihadist self. Raised in the anti-Amman milieu of Zarqa,³⁰ he was described as a tattooed delinquent who drank heavily, experimented with drugs and was involved in criminal activity. Al-Zarqawi had no religious training until he was 22 when he was ordered to a local mosque known for radicalism and

Islamic education?" in `Azzam, *Defence of Muslim Lands*.

15 For example, in 2004 al-Qa`ida's senior leadership was successful in incorporating the part of the militant Saudi Salafist movement and al-Zarqawi's Jama`at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad under the al-Qa`ida name. Recently, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) has also changed their name in a formal allegiance to al-Qa`ida.

16 For example, see al-Zawahiri, "The Open Meeting with Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri."

17 Montasser al-Zayyat, *The Road to al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden's Right-Hand Man* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), pp. 15-18.

18 Ibid., pp. 42-46.

19 See the section on Sayyid Qutb in *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, in Laura Mansfield, *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman Al*

Zawahiri (Old Tappan, NJ: TLG Publications, 2006), pp. 47-53.

20 William McCants and Jarret Brachman, *Militant Ideology Atlas* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2006), p. 13, pp. 261-274.

21 Conversations with these two individuals were likely the catalyst behind the expansion of al-Zawahiri's definition of *takfir*. See Wright, *The Looming Tower*, pp. 122-126.

22 For example, see al-Zawahiri's discussion of the Iraqi and Pakistani governments and security forces in Mansfield, *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri*, pp. 324-336.

23 U.S.A. v. *Usama bin Laden et al.*, Southern District of New York, 2001.

24 See al-Zawahiri's numerous references to the Muslim Brotherhood throughout *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, in Mansfield, *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri*.

25 This was al-Zawahiri's answer to the question quoted in the introduction of this essay. See al-Zawahiri, "The Open Meeting with Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri."

26 Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi," July 9, 2005.

27 Tom Ricks, "Situation Called Dire in West Iraq," *Washington Post*, September 11, 2006.

28 Michael Howard, "Iraq Slips Towards Civil War After Attack on Shia Shrine," *Guardian*, September 11, 2006.

29 This is evidenced by the continued elation of his "heroism" in jihadist forums, including a video game showing his face beside Bin Laden's. See, for example, "Web Video Game Aim: 'Kill' Bush Characters," CNN, September 18, 2006. He was also recently featured in a series of jihadist cell phone videos released by al-Qa`ida media outlets. See "Al-Qaeda Offers Cellphone Video Downloads," *USA Today*, January 5, 2008.

30 Jean-Charles Brisard and Damien Martinez, *Zarqawi: The New Face of al-Qaeda* (New York: Other Press, 2005), pp. 6-9.

its relationship to the Afghan jihad.³¹ There, al-Zarqawi's trajectory swung 180 degrees and he became entrenched in Salafism.³²

Before setting out for Afghanistan in 1989, al-Zarqawi received a few months of religious indoctrination at al-Husayn Ben `Ali Mosque.³³ In Afghanistan, al-Zarqawi, like most other "Afghan Arabs," was taught and further radicalized by a number of Islamist scholars and ideologues including `Abdullah `Azzam, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Ayman al-Zawahiri.³⁴ He devoted his spare time to self studies of Salafi-jihadi sermons and the Qur'an. In Jordan, after returning from Afghanistan, al-Zarqawi continued his regimented self-studies (especially in prison³⁵) and strengthened his relationship with al-Maqdisi.³⁶ During his second trip in Afghanistan, al-Zarqawi was largely concerned with international operations and his training camp, an explosives and firearms training center, leaving little time for religious studies. In Iraq, al-Zarqawi was affiliated with local Salafi-jihadi religious leaders in addition to his continued contact with al-Maqdisi and al-Zawahiri,³⁷ although his operational focus and tempo likely occupied most of his time. This self-

taught understanding of Islam and jihad left al-Zarqawi to construct his own interpretation of Salafism and *takfir* within his combat environment.

Definition of Takfir

The breadth of al-Zarqawi's definition of *takfir* left few in his graces, likely because his Islamic "education" was wholly gained from *takfiri* ideologues and self-studies in combat settings. Sunni politicians were excommunicated, as were Sunni police and military, which he considered "the eyes, ears and hands of the occupier."³⁸ Those collaborating with the government security apparatuses and especially those working with U.S. forces were deemed traitors. In towns controlled by al-Zarqawi's forces in Iraq, anyone violating his organization's interpretation of Shari'a was excommunicated for their transgressions.³⁹ Lastly, al-Zarqawi considered all Shi'a apostates.⁴⁰

Djamel Zitouni

In the 1990s, Algeria witnessed an extremely bloody civil war. The heart of the struggle was the Islamist opposition to the repressive incumbent government. Djamel Zitouni led the Salafi-jihadi front (the Armed Islamic Group, or GIA) against the government from 1994 to 1996, continually increasing the target set of apostates until the time of his death. His brand of *takfir* was one of the most inclusive definitions to date and led to some of the grossest massacres of civilians in recent jihadist history.

Religious Training

Little is known of Zitouni's religious scholarship, suggesting that his Islamic education was unimpressive

and therefore omitted from his media constructed persona. The son of a chicken farmer, Zitouni likely received only rudimentary formal religious training.⁴¹ Omar Sheikhi, a self-proclaimed GIA *amir*, described Zitouni's Islamic background as being "average."⁴² He was undoubtedly inculcated with militant Islamist ideas during his short tenure

"Longevity within the religion and extensive self studies of Shari'a outside of a combat environment has led to a more 'moderate' interpretation of takfir."

in prison for his involvement with the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS),⁴³ and further indoctrinated into the world of militant Islamism by Mustafa Bouyali, the leader of the Algerian Armed Islamic Movement.⁴⁴ Zitouni's religious training and expertise was informed largely by the Afghan Arabs⁴⁵ and he was further radicalized by the paranoid exclusivity characteristic of the GIA's worldview. His reliance on the guidance of others with combat experience rather than institutional Shari'a education likely allowed Zitouni to use Islam as an *ex post facto* justification for operations rather than an organizational determinant.

Definition of Takfir

Learned wholly in the context of an armed struggle, Zitouni likely molded his religion to fit his goals rather than his learned religion determining his means; this allowed him to

31 Brisard and Martinez, *Zarqawi: The New Face of al-Qaeda*, pp. 11-14.

32 This type of radicalization, swinging from one extreme to the other, is not uncommon. It is similar to the effect of those having "found themselves" in a new religion. For example, see Bernhard's description of converts in Brendan Bernhard, *White Muslim: From L.A. to New York...to Jihad?* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2006). For a broad review concerning the tendency of converts toward radicalism, see Thomas Robbins, *Cults, Converts and Charisma: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 1988).

33 Brisard and Martinez, *Zarqawi: The New Face of al-Qaeda*, pp. 11-14.

34 Ibid., pp. 16-26.

35 Al-Zarqawi was sentenced to 15 years for his leadership role in Bay`at al-Imam, a radical Salafist organization aimed at overthrowing the monarchy in Jordan and establishing a Shari'a-based state.

36 Brisard and Martinez, *Zarqawi: The New Face of al-Qaeda*, pp. 33-41.

37 Al-Zarqawi was warned and rebuked for his indiscriminate killings by both al-Zawahiri and al-Maqdisi. See al-Zawahiri, "Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi"; and Nibras Kazimi, "A Virulent Ideology in Mutation: Zarqawi Upstages Maqdisi," in Hillel Fradkin et al. eds., *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology 2* (2005): pp. 60-63.

38 Nimrod Raphaeli, "The Sheikh of the Slaughterers: Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi and the Al-Qa'ida Connection," Middle East Media Research Institute, July 1, 2005.

39 Examples of "transgressions" are women in public not wearing a *hijab*, shop owners selling Western music and movies, and individuals selling or making alcohol. This information comes from the author's interview of Kevin Hutchinson, U.S. Marine Corps Explosives Ordinance Disposal Sergeant, January 2005. Hutchinson was part of the U.S. Marine force that retook Falluja in the fall of 2004. He relayed a detailed account by the Falluja residents of the enforcement of Shari'a there.

40 "Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi: Collateral Killing of Muslims is Legitimate," Middle East Media Research Institute, June 7, 2005. It is interesting that al-Zarqawi openly declared this in a Shi'a majority country, stating that their "perfidy is engraved in the forehead of history."

41 The only reported Islamic guidance Zitouni is reported to have received came from readings of Shari'a with an unknown figure named Sherif Kouasmi. See Camille al-Tawil, "Lakhdaria Emir Reveals Secrets and Internal Liquidations of the Mountain, GIA Emir was Accused of Becoming Shiite After Some Elements Received Training in Lebanon - Part III," *Dar al-Hayat*, June 13, 2007.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 See the "Groupe Islamique Arme (GIA) Dossier," available from the Center for Policing Terrorism at www.cpt-mi.org.

45 Evan Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria: The GIA, the GSPC and al-Qaida," The NEFA Foundation, May 2007, pp. 2-3.

unapologetically kill thousands of Algerian Muslim civilians.⁴⁶ Zitouni's concept of *takfir* eventually placed the whole of Algerian society in one of two categories: GIA or apostate. Initially, government leaders, members of the intelligentsia, government security forces, and collaborators were determined "apostate." Additionally, anyone even tangentially employed by a state-affiliated institution was an apostate. Zitouni's organization then declared all other organizations (to include the FIS) illegitimate and apostate. Having "proved" the GIA to be the only legitimate movement, any dissenters (and often those suspected of dissention) were automatically excommunicated and killed. Finally, in light of the successful presidential election in November 1995, Zitouni argued that the whole of Algerian society "had left Islam" and should be considered apostate.⁴⁷

Conclusion

While there are rare instances of formally trained "pen jihadists" advocating *takfir*,⁴⁸ these cases suggest two general trends regarding the relationship between religious training and *takfir*. First, a lack of formal religious training will likely lead a Salafi-jihadi leader to accept *takfir* as a valid and necessary doctrinal component. From the cases examined, extensive formal religious training has led to a rejection of *takfir* altogether.⁴⁹ Second, the less religious training a jihadist leader has, the greater his proclivity to excommunicate

and kill more categories of Muslims. Longevity within the religion and extensive self studies of Shari'a outside of a combat environment has led to a more "moderate" interpretation of *takfir*. Furthermore, individuals radicalized during jihad and having irreligious pasts espouse extremely broad definitions of *takfir*. Comparing al-Zarqawi and Zitouni, al-Zarqawi's personal interest in Islam and Shari'a prior to his second trip to Afghanistan versus Zitouni's apparent sole interest in battle seems to have given al-Zarqawi a slightly less encompassing definition of *takfir*.

This correlation between *takfir* and a lack of religious training challenges Salafi-jihadis' claim to a nuanced and veracious understanding of Islam. Given constant debate over the correct construction and implementation of *takfir*⁵⁰ and noting the decline of several movements due to their proclivity for killing Muslims,⁵¹ *takfir* is evidently an existential determinant for Salafi-jihadi organizations.

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46 Ibid., pp. 8-9.

47 International Crisis Group, "Islamism, Violence, and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page," July 30, 2004, p. 14. This is an exaggerated form of Qutb's declaration that the Muslim world has returned to *jahiliyya*, the state of societal ignorance prior to the Prophet Muhammad's revelation of the Qur'an.

48 `Umar `Abd al-Rahman and Abu Qatada are two *takfiri* "pen jihadists" having formal Islamic credentials. Even as "pen jihadists," these individuals seem to be exceptions to the rule; to call Islamic Ph.D.s who espouse a *takfiri* ideology a minority would be a gross understatement. Additionally, a comparison between "pen jihadists" and combat leaders is difficult to make. "Pen jihadists" are able to make conjecture absent any experience of physical jihad and irrespective of practical application.

49 Also of note is that `Azzam is the only leader of a Salafi-jihadi organization to have achieved a doctoral level of Islamic training. While there are a few "pen jihadists" who espouse a *takfiri* cant, `Azzam is the only Ph.D. of Islam to have physically led an organization in battle.

50 See Pakistani opinions of targeting the Pakistani military and killing of Pakistani civilians in "Results of a New Nationwide Public Opinion Survey of Pakistan before the February 18th Elections," Terror Free Tomorrow, January 2008. Also, see responses to questions about attacking civilians by those polled in Muslim countries in Steven Kull et al., "Muslim Public Opinion on U.S. Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda," WorldPublicOpinion.org, April 24, 2007.

51 For example, the GIA, al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra, and al-Zarqawi's organization are all victims of their extreme *takfiri* doctrines.

Iran's Shi'a Reach Out to Mainstream Salafists

By Alex Vatanka

THE IRANIAN STATE, politically and spiritually led by Shi'a Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is publicly unwavering in its commitment to forge unity among Muslim countries. Tehran is again reaching out to Arab adherents of Salafism and Wahhabism, the historical antagonists of the Shi'a. Khamenei has declared the present Iranian year (ending March 2009) as the Year of National Unity and Islamic Solidarity. Iran's rival for leadership in the Islamic world, Saudi Arabia, is also emphasizing the necessity of religious dialogue. Two recent pan-Islamic conferences held in Tehran in May and in Mecca in June were aimed at lessening intra-Muslim differences, although in both instances scant explicit measures to achieve this objective were produced.

In practice, Shi'a-majority Iran and its Arab Sunni neighbors are at best reluctant, and at worst unable, to agree on a path to religious reconciliation between Islam's two largest branches. Much of the recent publicized enthusiasm for dialogue among Islam's various sects is above all driven by political motivations aimed at containing sectarian violence in the Middle East. Genuine Islamic accord, particularly among Shi'a and Sunnis, would require the full backing of senior religious authorities, but this has not been forthcoming.

Salafists Travel to Iran

From May 4-6, 2008, the Iranian authorities hosted some 850 Muslim clerics (*ulama*) and intellectuals from 45 countries in Tehran for the 21st annual Islamic Unity Conference.¹ The initiative had first been touted by Iran's foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, in December 2006 who then stated that "the Islamic Republic of Iran has always called for unity among Muslims." Mottaki's pledge was political and made on the back of accusations by Sunni states that the summer 2006 war between Hizb Allah and Lebanon was an Iranian and Shi'a

1 "International Islamic Unity Conference Starts in Tehran," Islamic Republic News Agency, May 4, 2008.

design to make inroads into the Arab Sunni world. The 2006 war effectively hastened the deterioration in relations between Shi'a and Sunnis, the old-age rift that had been violently rejuvenated following the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. As with previous pan-Muslim gatherings in Tehran, the claim of

“Much of the recent publicized enthusiasm for dialogue among Islam’s various sects is above all driven by political motivations aimed at containing sectarian violence in the Middle East.”

the Iranian organizers was to provide a forum to generate debate among Muslims of different sects and continue to push for a charter on Islamic unity. According to Iran’s state-funded Press TV, the charter has already been signed by 2,000 Muslim scholars, a key facet of which is the rejection of *takfirism*, a school of thought among hard line Sunnis that considers Shi’ism as heresy and sanctions violence against the latter.²

The conference in Tehran was chaired by Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, Iran’s director-general of the World Forum for the Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought. Taskhiri, handpicked for the position by Ayatollah Khamenei, courted Salafist participation for the event and spoke of similar efforts having reduced Sunni “misunderstandings” of Shi’a beliefs and practices and particularly in regard to Pakistani Sunnis.³ At the event, no senior Salafist/Wahhabi clerics were present, although there were Arab Salafist participants from countries such as Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran’s president from 1989-1997, and presently chairman of two of Iran’s most powerful political institutions—the Assembly of Experts and the Expediency Council—devoted his address to the gathering on likely rewards Muslim countries could garner if they overcame internal strife and isolated extremists.⁴ On May 9, Rafsanjani continued the same line, by stating in a sermon that “the extremist Shi’a and Sunnis are separating two important sections of the Muslim world,” which is a “waste,” but that if anything “disagreements in the Muslim world are increasing.” He then notably urged the Shi’a to rethink some of the sect’s beliefs and practices, maintaining that unless re-examination first occurs among the Shi’a the gap with the Sunnis will only widen. “You can see how much Sunnis refer to the exaggerated statements in our books and traditions, and accordingly call us pagans,” he said. “There are plenty of such statements,” and unless “corrective measures are implemented the Sunnis will retain the opinion that Shi’a are apostates because they see their [Shi’a] imams as gods, which is not the case.” Rafsanjani also urged Shi’a to refrain from “insulting [the] Prophet’s disciples, the four caliphs and those who are regarded as saints by Sunnis.”⁵

Advancing the need to curtail unorthodox Shi’a traditions and practices has been a constant feature of the theological debate in Iran, and predates the present Islamist government that came to power in 1979. In recent years, however, the urgency has mounted, at least in the eyes of those clergy who are loyal to the concept of the Shi’a *velayat-e faqih* (Guardianship of Jurisprudent) and the model of the Islamic Republic. This is due to the rise of the popularity of Islamic mysticism in Iran, and the emergence of Shi’a practices among some rural and poor urban communities in Iran that put emphasis on revering Imams ‘Ali,

Husayn or Hasan, and Fatima al-Zahra, the Prophet’s daughter. A number of Iranian Shi’a clergy have spoken against such trends, and warn that it effectively amounts to *kufr* (disbelief), as in Islam no human being should be worshipped.⁶ In relation to Sufism, or Islamic mystic sects, the state views their unorthodox and unregulated religious practices as a challenge to the theocratic regime’s monopoly on religious authority and guidance, which it deems to basically underpin its political legitimacy.

Since 2006, for example, Iran has witnessed a number of government crackdowns on Sufi orders, the first of which occurred in the holy Shi’a city of Qom in February 2006 when around 200 people were hurt in clashes between police, Islamist Basiji militias and Sufi disciples. Another Sufi place of worship belonging to the Nimatullahi order was razed to the ground on November 11, 2007 in the western city of Boroujerd. Official media reported that the clashes came after adherents attacked a Shi’a mosque whose clerics had been publicly condemning Sufism over the minaret loudspeakers.⁷

Others Issue an Anti-Shi’a Letter

Regardless of the nature of its motivations, Iranian pleas for Islamic unity made little impression on some of Saudi Arabia’s most senior Wahhabi clerics. Twenty-two of them issued an anti-Shi’a statement on June 1 in which they accused the Shi’a of abusing Sunnis under their control. “If they [Shi’a] have a country, they humiliate and exert control in their rule over Sunnis,” and specifically mentioned conditions in Iran and Iraq. “They sow strife, corruption and destruction

6 Shi’a Muslims hold the following five people above all others: Prophet Muhammad, Fatima al-Zahra (his daughter), his son-in-law and cousin, ‘Ali, and his grandsons Hasan and Husayn. See Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006). For an interesting sermon on Sunni perceptions of Shi’a on this matter, see Hojjat-ol Eslam Mehdi Daneshmand at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOvsFspC3M&. Daneshmand decries some Shi’a practices that have emerged in Iran, such as Shi’a ceremonial chanting that equates Imam Husayn with Allah, suggesting that they amount to *kufr* or the rejection of the oneness of Allah, and which enables Sunnis to represent Shi’a as heretics and justify violence against them.

7 “Iran’s Sufis in the Limelight,” *Jane’s Islamic Affairs Analyst*, March 2008.

2 “Iran to Host Islamic Unity Conference,” Press TV, May 4, 2008.

3 “Salafi Scholars Can Also Express Their Opinions in Iran,” Fars News Agency, May 1, 2008.

4 “Criticizing the Extremism of the Islamic World,” *Etemad-e Melli*, May 5, 2008.

5 See summary of speech by Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Tehran, May 9, 2008. For a relatively recent Shi’a critique of the Wahhabi sect, see Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (New York: Islamic Publications International, 2002). Note that Algar makes an unambiguous distinction between “Salafism” and “Wahhabism,” and it is the latter that is the target of his censure.

among Muslims and destabilize security in Muslim countries...such as Yemen.”⁸ The tone of the letter is not dissimilar to anti-Shi’a material found on extremist Salafist or jihadist websites that glorify violence against Shi’a, or the 2007 statement of Ayman al-Zawahiri who accused Iranian Shi’a leaders to be “intent on establishing certain [Islamic] concepts which nullify the intellects of their followers and prevent them from understanding the Qur’an and Sunna, except through [the Shi’a clergy’s] interpretations and explanations.”⁹

While the tough worded letter was a mere re-statement of a sentiment prevalent among Saudi Wahhabis, it was issued only three days before the opening of an inter-faith dialogue conference held by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in Islam’s holy city of Mecca between June 4-7. Bringing together some 500 Islamic scholars and academics, the Mecca-based Muslim World League (MWL), which organized the event, had hoped the initiative would represent

“In the final analysis, in neither Tehran nor Mecca did the attendees produce tangible action plans to facilitate Shi’a-Sunni unity.”

Saudi Arabia and King Abdullah in the West as forces of moderation in the Islamic world. Still, and despite official Saudis distancing themselves from the letter, it, combined with the fact that Saudi Arabia’s indigenous Shi’a minority were officially barred from the Mecca conference, somewhat lessened the ability, if not the sincerity, of Saudi officials to reach out to the Shi’a.¹⁰

8 Donna Abu Nasr, “Saudi Clerics Criticize Shiites for Destabilizing,” Associated Press, June 1, 2008.

9 “Qaeda Video Taunts Bush, Iran, Shiites,” CNN, May 5, 2007.

10 Saudi officials barred not just the Shi’a, but all non-Wahhabi sects. According to the pan-Arab newspaper *al-Quds al-Arabi*, “Fatimide, Isma’ili, Shi’is or any non-Salafi Sunni citizens [were] excluded. The Arab Shi’i participation was restricted to Shaykh Jawad al-Salihi who lives outside Iraq, is opposed to the Iraqi Government, and calls for its downfall.” See *al-Quds al-Arabi*,

Iranian media reported the ban on Saudi Shi’a attendance and also gave coverage to reports of three Shi’a mosques and eight Shi’a clergy and community elders being arrested in the Eastern Province of the country while the intra-faith conference was in session in Mecca.¹¹ In spite of the malign Saudi ban, Iranian media by and large avoided any scattling of condemnation, perhaps a reflection of Iranian appreciation that King Abdullah is engaged in a struggle of his own with radical Wahhabi clergy and their sympathizers in the kingdom. Nonetheless, the intended political message in Mecca was palpable. At the opening ceremony, King Abdullah walked into the conference hall with Rafsanjani, who later sat on the king’s left on the center stage, interpreted by Saudi media to signal that the Wahhabi kingdom does not have a problem with moderate Shi’a.¹²

Conclusion

In the final analysis, in neither Tehran nor Mecca did the attendees produce tangible action plans to facilitate Shi’a-Sunni unity. This is a reflection of the level of suspicion and doctrinal divide, which is exacerbated due to the geopolitical rivalry of Iran and Sunni Arab states particularly since 2003.¹³ At the same time as Saudi Shi’a were effectively facing disfranchisement in relation to the Mecca conference, there were reports of arrests of Sunni clergy in Iran’s Kordestan and Balochistan provinces, and fear that the United Arab Emirates is financing the spread of Wahhabism in southern Iran. The Shi’a-Sunni gap is indeed real.¹⁴ In

June 5, 2008.

11 “Closure of Shi’a Mosques and Arrest of Shi’a Clergy in Saudi Arabia,” RajaNews.com, June 7, 2008.

12 “Saudis Launch Islamic Unity Drive,” BBC, June 4, 2008.

13 Recently, Saudi Wahhabi scholar Ibn Jabarayn called for the massacre of the Shi’a in a tape recording broadcast on the internet. The exact edict is, “The blood of the rafezi [derogatory word for Shi’a] is halal [religiously permissible].”

14 According to a report by the Iranian website www.as-iran.com, UAE-based Salafists are providing cash and religious Salafist literature to ethnic Arab seafarers from Iran on visit to the UAE. The aim is to spread Salafism in southern Iranian coastal areas, home to many ethnic Arab Sunnis. According to www.jahannews.com, a Sunni cleric in Balochistan was also recently arrested on allegations of cooperating with the Iranian ethnic Baloch and Sunni terrorist organization, Jund Allah. Meanwhile,

the case of the Mecca conference, the objective was officially more about Muslims reaching out to Jews and Christians, somewhat fanciful given deep-seated intra-Muslim distrust and while holding the conference in Mecca, a city where non-Muslims are by law banned.

Nevertheless, the recent Iranian and Saudi attempts should not be dismissed. Both events had the backing of the highest echelons of powers in the respective states. Ayatollahs Khamenei and Rafsanjani, often deemed as fierce rivals, judged the matter of intra-Islamic dialogue sufficiently worthy to both rally behind it. King Abdullah, too, has maintained the momentum for such a dialogue in his kingdom despite often stiff opposition, as seen in the anti-Shi’a letter signed by the 22 Wahhabi clerics who sought to undermine him.

It is clear that political and not religious drivers have been the primary catalysts in both instances, and both Iranian Shi’a and Saudi Wahhabi clerical establishments continue to contain dangerously sectarian voices that will prove stubborn in their views. Still, in an age when sectarian violence has almost become the norm in various Middle Eastern arenas, from Iraq to Lebanon and from Pakistan to Yemen, the two leading Shi’a and Sunni states in the world can ill afford to let others take the initiative.

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www.mizannnews.com reported that two Sunni clerics, Seifullah Hosseini, Friday prayer leader of Khatam al-Anbia mosque in Saqez, and Hossein Hosseini, Friday prayer leader of Hamzeh mosque in Javan-roud in Kord-estan, were arrested.

A Global Counter-Insurgency Campaign Plan for the War on Terror

By Colonel James H. Johnson, U.S. Army

IN 2003, THE DEPARTMENT of Defense approved the USSOCOM counter-terrorism campaign plan, which includes both direct and indirect actions to achieve the strategic objective of defeating radical Islamic organizations. After reassessing the nature of the war and the enemy, it is now time to change the campaign plan from a counter-terrorism framework to a global counter-insurgency framework. Although written for the operational level, FM 3-24 Counter-Insurgencies provides a useful method for developing a global counter-insurgency strategic framework. FM 3-24 directs the use of Logical Lines of Operation (LLOs) in the design of a counter-insurgency plan. Commanders use LLOs to visualize, describe and direct operations when positional reference to enemy forces has little relevance. A plan based on LLOs unifies the efforts of joint, interagency, multinational and partner nation forces toward a common purpose. Each LLO represents a conceptual category along which agencies and partner nations intend to attack the insurgent/enemy strategy. This construct facilitates attacking the enemy strategy, not just the enemy forces.

Success requires careful coordination along all LLOs. Success also depends upon the support of partner nation institutions, and their ability to provide basic services, economic opportunity, public order and security. Military forces can compel obedience and secure areas. They cannot by themselves achieve the decisive point needed to resolve an insurgency. The proposed campaign framework is composed of seven LLOs: combat operations, homeland defense, WMD/E non-proliferation, partner nation security force development, economic development, development for global infrastructure for democracy, and information operations.

Proposed Campaign Framework

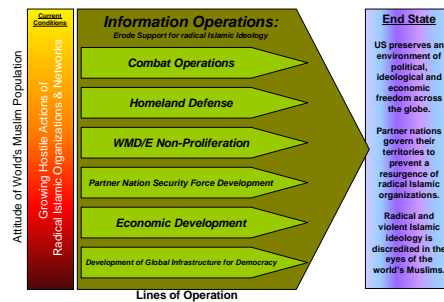


Figure 1. Proposed Counter-insurgency Campaign Framework.

The Seven LLOs

The Combat Operations LLO has been the main effort in the first six years of the war. Actions along this line of operation disrupt the ability of radical Islamic organizations to operate effectively over time. These actions focus on attacking the network infrastructure and leadership that provides the enemy global access and connectivity. These actions attack the organizations and the resources they need to operate and survive over the long-term. Finally, actions along this line of operation provide sufficient time to allow the effects from the other lines of operation.

The Homeland Defense LLO consists of both offensive and defensive actions taken by DoD and other U.S. government agencies to deter the enemy from conducting future attacks against the U.S. or U.S. interests. Actions along this line protect the United States' strategic center of gravity and critical capabilities—U.S. national will, international legitimacy and the global economy. As in the first LLO, actions along this line of operation will provide sufficient time to allow the effects from the other lines of operation.

The WMD/E Non-Proliferation LLO is oriented directly on the enemy's desires to obtain WMD/E. This line of operation consists of those actions designed to deny acquisition, development and/or use of WMD/E by radical Islamic organizations, and maintain capacity for consequence management. It will also include those activities that serve to deter the enemy from utilizing WMD/E against the U.S. and U.S. interests.

The development of partner nation security forces consists of those actions taken by DoD, in support of the larger

U.S. government effort, to ensure that partner security forces, both regular and irregular, have the will, capacity, and capability to effectively conduct operations to defeat radical Islamic organizations. The United States' partners have the cultural and historical understanding that, when coupled with U.S. government technology, intelligence, and training, will allow them to execute operations within their borders that will defeat radical Islamic organizations. The potential capability of U.S. partners to fight radical Islamic organizations in their own territory could make this line of operation the decisive military effort in the campaign over time.

The Economic Development LLO consists of those DoD actions, as a part of a larger interagency effort, which stimulates partner nations' economic status in the global economy. Improving the economic conditions at the campaign's decisive point—the world's Muslim population in contested areas—will make radical Islamic organizations less appealing to people who have no hope of a stable life. In this line of operation the DoD can assist in attacking financial sources of support for radical Islamic organizations. Actions taken along this line of operation will identify the sources of support, the nature of support (active or tacit) and the means to deter those sources over time.

The next line of effort is drawn from the effort to advance democracies as outlined in the NSCT-06. The effort to develop global infrastructure for democracy consists of those DoD actions, as a part of a larger U.S. government effort, that improve partner nations' ability to govern in the framework of the rule of law. This is not an effort to spread American-style democracy throughout the world. This effort is focused on building partner nation legitimacy. Legitimacy cannot be bestowed by U.S. actions. Legitimacy must be obtained by responsible actions of the partner government. The U.S. supports partner nations by assisting in providing a secure and stable environment in which regional governments can develop.

The campaign framework's overarching effort will be Information Operations LLO which is nested to the nation's Strategic Communications plan. This

effort is directly linked to the president's War of Ideas as outlined in NSCT-06. This line of operation, as a part of a larger interagency effort, will erode legitimacy of radical Islamic ideology. These actions focus on neutralizing the ability of radical Islamic organizations to use an extremist interpretation of Islam to justify the use of terrorism in pursuit of their aims; isolating violent extremist organizations from the populations that provide them freedom of action and resources; and diminishing the underlying conditions to reduce the tacit and active support for violent extremists over time. Efforts should be focused on ideological vulnerabilities exploiting Islamic fault lines between Sunni and Shi'a, the hypocrisy of terrorism as a religiously approved tactic and the enemy's reliance on trust within clandestine networks.

Six Key Objectives

In the proposed campaign plan, the U.S. will have six key objectives. These campaign objectives will provide the results necessary to achieve measures of performance required for the specified termination criteria. The campaign objectives are:

1. Defeat radical Islamic organizations which are attacking the U.S. and its global interests.
2. Neutralize or contain other radical extremist organizations which interfere with U.S. efforts to defeat those who attack the U.S. and its global interests.
3. Block acquisition and/or use of WMD/E by radical Islamic organizations.
4. Support Foreign Internal Defense efforts for partner nations.
5. Support Security Assistance Operations for partner nations.
6. Support Humanitarian and Civic Assistance in contested regions.

A global counter-insurgency cannot succeed without the success of partner nations' internal security forces. These forces not only achieve tactical and operational successes against the enemy, but they provide strong legitimacy to their governments if they become respected institutions. Through Foreign Internal Defense (FID) efforts with partner nations, the United States can assist in the following ways: 1. defeat of radical Islamic organizations and networks in partner nations; 2). secure borders and transit zones thus assisting

in denying radical Islamic organizations of the resources they need to operate and survive; 3. provide a secure and stable environment for culturally and politically progressive Arab governments to govern, thus discrediting violent extremist ideology in the eyes of the world's Muslims. Priority of effort for FID and partnership operations should be in Iraq, Afghanistan, and then Jordan.

“The United States’ challenge is to ensure that national power is used within a strategy that fits the nature of the war and adversary”

The U.S. was successful in shaping the global environment during the Cold War by assisting partner nations in their internal security efforts. By supporting Security Assistance Operations for partner nations, the U.S. builds the necessary capability and capacity for their security forces to function. Security Assistance refers to the group of programs that support national policies and objectives by providing defense material, military training and other defense related support to foreign nations by grants, loans, credit, or cash sales. Priority for these efforts should go to security forces in legitimate partner nations in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, Sub-Sahara Africa, South Asia, Central Asia, and the Asian Littoral. Programs will include, but are not limited to, Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Financing, International Military Education and Training, the Economic Support Fund, and Arms Export Control-licensed commercial sales. The military can support these activities through military training teams, maintenance support personnel and training, and other related activities.

Humanitarian and Civic Assistance programs consist of assistance provided in conjunction with military operations and exercises. By law, they are authorized by the secretary of state, and planned and appropriated in the defense budget. These missions should focus

on: 1. medical, dental, and veterinary care for rural areas of a country; 2. construction of rudimentary surface transportation systems; 3. well drilling and construction of basic sanitation facilities; 4. rudimentary construction and repair of public facilities; and 5). mine detection and clearance.

Based upon this analysis, the mission statement and commander's intent can be articulated. These are nested with the national policy and strategy.

Mission

When directed, the Department of Defense in coordination with other governmental agencies and coalition partners conducts a global campaign to defeat radical Islamic organizations and networks which use terrorism to achieve their goals in order to preserve the way of life of free and open societies, and create a global environment unsupportive of extremist organizations which use terrorism.

Commander's Intent

Purpose: To preserve the way of life of free and open societies, and create a global environment unsupportive of extremist organizations which use terrorism.

Method: Our priority task is to defeat radical Islamic organizations and networks which use terrorism to achieve their goals. This is achieved through the simultaneous execution of the following supporting key tasks:

1. Defeat radical Islamic attacks against the U.S., its allies, and partners.
2. Isolate radical Islamic organizations from the resources needed to operate and survive. (Resources: leadership, foot soldiers, safe havens, weapons, funds, communications and movement, access to targets, and ideological support.)
3. Block WMD/E proliferation, and recover/ eliminate uncontrolled materials.
4. Support and enable partner nations to counter radical Islamic terror organizations.
5. Secure state and non-state support to counter radical Islamic terror organizations in coordination with other U.S. government agencies and partner nations.
6. Retain conditions that allow partner nations to govern their territory

effectively and maintain a global anti-terrorist environment.

End State

The United States has preserved an environment of political, ideological and economic freedom across the globe. Partner nations govern their territories to prevent a resurgence of violent extremist organizations. Radical and violent Islamic ideology is discredited in the eyes of the world's Muslims. This environment is measured by the following Termination Criteria:

1. Attacks against the U.S., its allies, and partners are defeated or interdicted.
2. Radical Islamic organizations are incapable or unwilling to attack the U.S., its allies, or interests.
3. Key leaders of radical Islamic organizations are killed or captured.
4. Enemy organizations and networks are denied possession of WMD/E.
5. Partner nations possess the capability and capacity to counter radical Islamic terror organizations within their territory—particularly in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, Sub-Sahara Africa, South Asia, Central Asia, and the Asian Littoral.
6. Partner nations possess the capability and capacity to secure their borders and transit zones, to assist in denying enemy organizations the resources needed to operate and survive.
7. Partner nations possess a secure and stable environment to discredit violent extremist ideology in the eyes of the world's Muslims, and non-extremist models of moderation within the Muslim world have popular, vocal support.

The GWOT has the characteristics of an insurgency: protracted, asymmetric and ambiguous political mobilization to alter the balance of global power.¹ Terrorism is a subset of this insurgency.² The United States' challenge is to ensure that national power is used within a strategy that fits the nature of the war and adversary. The ends will not change in a shift of strategy. What could change is the execution of a coherent theory of victory. A counter-insurgency strategy

may appear counter-intuitive and challenge the dominant traditions of the American way of war, but it appears to be the United States' best strategy for success.³

Colonel Jim Johnson is an Infantry officer with 22 years of service. He is a recent graduate of the Naval War College. He has operational experience in Afghanistan as a Brigade Operations Officer and has completed two deployments to Iraq as an Infantry Battalion Commander.

* * *

Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

May 16, 2008 (GLOBAL): Usama bin Ladin released a new audio message on Islamist internet forums, in which the al-Qa`ida leader vowed to "continue our struggle against the Israelis and their allies." The message, which was timed for release with Israel's 60th anniversary as an independent state, said that the Palestinian cause is "the core reason of the war between our civilization and your civilizations [Western nations]." Bin Ladin also claimed that the Palestinian cause was a critical factor behind the decisions of the September 11, 2001 hijackers "to fight for those subjected to injustice and the oppressed." – *AP, May 16*

May 16, 2008 (SOMALIA): UN-sponsored peacetalksbetweenSomalia'sTransitional Federal Government and opposition forces ended without agreement. The talks are scheduled to resume on May 31. – *Garowe Online, May 16*

May 16, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A child suicide bomber killed one Afghan soldier and injured two Canadian soldiers in Zhari district of Kandahar Province. Because the child approached soldiers with his arms in the air, there is the possibility that his explosives were either detonated remotely, or were set to detonate on a timer. – *CTV.ca, May 16*

May 16, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Authorities discovered the beheaded body of a paramilitary soldier in Bajaur Agency.

A note attached to the body of the soldier explained that the beheading was conducted by Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan in retaliation for the May 14 suspected U.S. airstrike on a target in Damadola. The note warned others against cooperating with authorities. – *Daily Times, May 17*

May 16, 2008 (UNITED STATES): A U.S. military judge hearing the case against Salim Hamdan, a former driver for Usama bin Ladin and a detainee at Guantanamo Bay, ruled that the trial should be postponed until mid-July so that the Supreme Court can decide whether detainees at Guantanamo Bay can challenge their detentions in U.S. civil courts. – *AP, May 16*

May 16, 2008 (EUROPE): French, German and Dutch authorities arrested 10 Turkish nationals on charges of financing the Islamic Jihad Union, an Islamist group connected to al-Qa`ida. – *Deutsche Press Agency, May 16*

May 17, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A NATO Chinook helicopter that was carrying Helmand Governor Golab Muhammad Mangal was hit by ground fire while flying near Musa Qala. The helicopter was forced to make an emergency landing due to a damaged rotor blade, but there were no injuries. The governor was traveling to Musa Qala in order to attend a ceremony. – *Reuters, May 17*

May 17, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A bicycle bomb exploded in Kandahar, killing a nine-year-old child and wounding four people, three of whom were police. The intended target was a police convoy traveling through the city. – *Reuters, May 17*

May 17, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Taliban militants released Pakistan's envoy to Afghanistan, Tariq Azizuddin, after holding him hostage since February 11. In exchange for his release, press reports allege that the Pakistani government freed from prison more than 40 Taliban fighters. According to one report, "The French news agency AFP quoted an unidentified security official as saying the ambassador was recovered late on May 16 from the custody of a local Taliban group just outside the Khyber tribal district in Pakistan. Other media reports in Pakistan said the envoy had been freed in Pakistan." – *Reuters, May 17; RFE/RL, May 17*

1 Steven Metz and Raymond Millen, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004), p. 24.

2 David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28:4 (2005): p. 606.

3 Colin S. Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), pp. 6-8.

May 17, 2008 (IRAQ): A female suicide bomber detonated her explosives in an office of the Sons of Iraq in Ba`quba, Diyala Province. One woman, along with the bomber, was killed. - *AFP, May 17*

May 17, 2008 (SOMALIA): Islamist fighters took control of the southern city of Jilib—located 250 miles south of Mogadishu—after defeating a government-supported militia group. - *al-Jazira, May 17; AFP, May 17*

May 18, 2008 (YEMEN): A Yemeni judge jailed Jabir al-Banna, an al-Qa`ida operative, for an unspecified period of time. The United States has a \$5 million reward on al-Banna's capture, although the Yemeni government had until now refused to jail him even though his whereabouts were known; he was allowed to move around freely during his ongoing trial, in which he is charged with plotting to blow up oil installations in 2006. - *Washington Post, May 18*

May 18, 2008 (GLOBAL): Usama bin Ladin released a new audio message—distinct from his message of May 16—in which he criticized Arab leaders for sacrificing the Palestinians. According to Bin Ladin, Arab leaders “sacrificed Palestine and al-Aqsa to keep their crowns...They have decided that peace with the Zionists is their strategic option, so damn their decision.” He also spoke about Lebanese Hizb Allah, criticizing the group for allowing UN peacekeepers into southern Lebanon “to protect the Jews.” - *AP, May 18*

May 18, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed at least 11 people after blowing himself up by a market situated near the gate of an army base in Mardan District, North-West Frontier Province. Four soldiers guarding the entrance to the base were among those killed. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan took credit for the operation, stating that it was “in reaction to Damadola,” referring to the May 14 missile strike targeting their forces; Pakistan has accused the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan for being behind that attack. - *Chicago Tribune, May 19; New York Times, May 19*

May 18, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed four civilians after he detonated his explosives at the main market in Musa Qala, Helmand Province. - *CNN, May 18*

May 19, 2008 (IRAQ): Iraqi officials claimed that they had arrested al-Qa`ida in Iraq's *wali*, or governor, for Mosul. The suspect, identified as `Abd al-Khaliq Awad Ismail al-Sabawi, was arrested in Salah al-Din province. - *AP, May 19*

May 19, 2008 (IRAQ): At least 11 Iraqi police recruits were killed while traveling in their minibus in the deserts of Ninawa Province. Suspected Sunni gunmen opened fire on the bus, killing everyone inside. - *AP, May 19*

May 20, 2008 (UNITED KINGDOM): Waheed Ali, a British Muslim accused of conspiring with the July 7, 2005 London bombers, told a court that he, along with the group's leader Muhammad Sidique Khan, received training at a Taliban camp in Afghanistan in the summer of 2001. - *Guardian, May 21*

May 20, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A roadside bomb exploded near a military truck in Kohat District, North-West Frontier Province. At least five soldiers were wounded by the blast. - *AP, May 20*

May 20, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Suspected Abu Sayyaf Group militants attacked and killed two Philippine soldiers as they were riding a motorcycle on their way to Patikul in Sulu Province. - *Philippine Inquirer, May 21*

May 20, 2008 (SOMALIA): An explosion in Mogadishu killed three Ethiopian and two Somali government soldiers. - *Voice of America, May 20*

May 21, 2008 (IRAQ): The acting commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East, Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey, told the Associated Press that “our forces and the Iraqi forces have certainly disrupted al-Qaida, probably to a level that we haven't seen at any time in my experience,” but warned that “they can regenerate, and do from time to time.” - *AP, May 21*

May 21, 2008 (PAKISTAN): The Pakistani government signed a deal with Taliban militants that will lead to the withdrawal of the Pakistani Army from Swat District of the North-West Frontier Province. According to the deal, Shari`a will be enforced in Swat and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) will be involved in securing law and order in the district. In exchange, TTP forces in Swat will cease attacks on

government security forces. According to one Taliban spokesman, “We have accepted to give up the armed struggle because the government has agreed to the complete enforcement of the Sharia laws. We are happy about the agreement but the success of it depends on the conduct of the government, especially in enforcing the Sharia laws.” - *International Herald Tribune, May 22; AFP, May 22*

May 21, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): According to a Philippine media industry official, the Abu Sayyaf Group may be behind illegally copying Hollywood movies and selling them to Manila stores in order to raise funds. - *AFP, May 21*

May 21, 2008 (SOMALIA): Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi pledged to keep his country's soldiers in Somalia until the “jihadists” are defeated. - *Reuters, May 21*

May 21, 2008 (SOMALIA): Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys, a former leader in Somalia's now defunct Islamic Courts Union, told journalists that “it is important to expel the enemy from all areas. We don't want a fight to the death. We don't want to kill all the Ethiopian soldiers. We want to save them. We want them to leave.” Aweys further explained that Somalia's Islamist opposition will “liberate Somalia from Ethiopia. Then we will form a government of national unity. We are all Muslims in Somalia. We have no idea of secularism. The people will place their trust in religion.” - *Guardian Unlimited, May 22*

May 21, 2008 (JORDAN): A Jordanian military court sentenced eight al-Qa`ida-linked operatives to life in prison for a 2004 plot to execute a chemical attack on the U.S. Embassy, along with other targets in the country. The 2004 plot was financed by then al-Qa`ida in Iraq leader Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, who gave the men \$118,000 for the operation. In a previous trial in 2006, the men were sentenced to death, but an appeals court overturned that ruling. - *AP, May 21*

May 21, 2008 (MOROCCO): Security officials announced the arrest of 11 al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb suspects. The men allegedly trained at al-Qa`ida camps in Iraq and in North Africa. According to a UPI report, “Moroccan officials said the cell was plotting attacks in the European Union and specifically a hotel in Belgium, though officials in Brussels couldn't confirm

the allegations.” One of the suspects is a Moroccan who was living in Belgium. – *UPI, May 21*

May 21, 2008 (NORTH AFRICA): Austrian diplomats told reporters that “things are progressing” in attempts to secure the release of two Austrian tourists who were kidnapped by al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb fighters while in Tunisia in February. Authorities suspect that the group moved the hostages to Mali. – *AFP, May 21*

May 22, 2008 (ISRAEL): A Palestinian suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden truck at the Erez passenger crossing, which connects the Gaza Strip with Israel. There were no casualties besides that of the bomber. – *AP, May 22*

May 22, 2008 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida ideologue Abu Yahya al-Libi released a new video statement on Islamist web forums in which he accused moderate Muslims of promoting Western ideas. According to al-Libi, “The duty of the Islamic nation is not to emulate the infidel nations, nor to lick their boots nor satisfy them...nor even look for ways to coexist.” – *AP, May 22*

May 23, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): U.S.-led soldiers launched an airstrike on an “extremist cell” in Garmser in Helmand Province, leading to a few casualties and a number of arrests. The U.S. military released a statement claiming that the cell was involved in financing and arming militants. – *AFP, May 24*

May 23, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Four Afghan Army soldiers and one civilian child were killed after a suicide bomber attacked a military convoy in Khost Province. – *Voice of America, May 23*

May 24, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leader Baitullah Mehsud pledged to continue carrying out attacks against international forces in Afghanistan despite a recently signed Taliban peace deal with the Pakistani government. According to Mehsud, “Fighting between the Taliban and Pakistan is harming Islam and Pakistan” and should cease immediately, but “jihad in Afghanistan will continue.” – *AP, May 24*

May 24, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Government security forces confiscated 283 bags of explosive components allegedly belonging to the Abu Sayyaf Group on Jolo Island in the southern Philippines. Speaking about the recovered components, a military spokesman said, “With blasting caps, and the ammonium nitrate, which is the basic ingredient in the so-called fertilizer bombs, it is obviously meant for a terrorist action.” – *Sun Star, May 26*

May 25, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): During a day of fighting between the Philippine military and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) militants in the southern Philippines, at least 17 Philippine Marines were wounded and two MILF fighters killed. The violence, which occurred in Tipo-Tipo on Basilan Island, was said to have also involved the Abu Sayyaf Group. – *AFP, May 25*

May 25, 2008 (SOMALIA): Islamist insurgents attacked a base of Ugandan peacekeepers in Mogadishu, sparking a gun battle that left approximately 18 people dead, most of whom were civilians. – *AFP, May 27*

May 26, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked a military convoy in Kandahar, killing a teenage civilian and wounding four Canadian soldiers. – *Canwest News Service, May 25*

May 26, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber driving a motorcycle blew himself up at a checkpoint controlled by Iraqi police and guards from a local Awakening Council in Tarmiyah, Salah al-Din Province. The blast killed four people, one of whom was a civilian. – *AP, May 26*

May 26, 2008 (IRAQ): A roadside bomb killed one U.S. soldier in Salah al-Din Province. – *AP, May 26*

May 26, 2008 (PAKISTAN): The Pakistani government signed a peace deal with a small Taliban militant group in Mohmand Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. As part of the deal, the government released from detention an unknown number of militants, and the Taliban group, which is led by Umar Khalid, pledged not to attack government security forces. Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, allegedly backed the deal. – *AP, May 27; AP, May 28*

May 27, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber detonated his explosives in Ninawa Province, killing six people and wounding more than 40. – *AFP, May 28*

May 27, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters killed nine policemen in an attack in Shorabak district, Kandahar Province. – *Voice of America, May 27*

May 27, 2008 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned four alleged leaders of Lashkar-i-Tayyaba (LeT), an Islamist group fighting against India for control of Kashmir. According to the statement, LeT is a “dangerous al-Qaida affiliate that has demonstrated its willingness to murder innocent civilians.” At least one of the named leaders, Muhammad Saeed, has since denied any involvement with LeT or al-Qa`ida. – *AP, May 28*

May 28, 2008 (THAILAND): Security forces killed three suspected Muslim militants during a village search in Yala Province. – *Reuters, May 28*

May 29, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide car bomber targeted a convoy of international troops in Kabul, killing three Afghan civilians. – *AP, May 28*

May 29, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber detonated his explosives amid a group of police officers in a village near Mosul, leaving two policemen and one civilian dead. – *AFP, May 29*

May 29, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives in a group of police recruits in Sinjar, Ninawa Province, leaving at least 16 people dead. – *AP, May 29*

May 29, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): A bomb exploded outside Edwin Andrews Air Base in Zamboanga City in the southern Philippines, killing two people and injuring 19 others. Authorities are investigating whether the Abu Sayyaf Group, or the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, was behind the cell phone detonated bomb. The U.S. government is assisting with the investigation. – *AP, May 29; Philippine Inquirer, May 31*

May 29, 2008 (YEMEN): A Yemeni government newspaper announced that in the past few days security forces have disrupted an 11-member al-Qa`ida cell in the capital. Of those detained,

six were Saudi Arabian and three were Chadian. According to a government source that spoke with AFP, "The Saudis are jihadists who originally wanted to go to Iraq but ended up coming to Yemen because of the strict measures taken by authorities in their country for monitoring the border with Iraq." – *AFP, May 29*

May 30, 2008 (YEMEN): Rockets were fired at an Aden oil refinery, yet they failed to cause any damage. The al-Qa`ida-linked Jund al-Yaman Brigades later took credit for the operation in a statement posted on Islamist websites. According to the statement, the purpose of the attack was to prevent the Yemeni government from supplying "fuel to the crusaders in their war on Islam." – *AFP, June 1*

May 30, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Canadian and Afghan forces killed Mullah Tohr Agha, a mid-level Taliban commander in Zhari district of Kandahar Province. – *The Canadian Press, May 31*

May 30, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): According to the Afghan Interior Ministry, Afghan and international forces recaptured the district of Bakwa in Farah Province, killing more than 100 Taliban-affiliated fighters in the process. – *AFP, May 31*

May 30, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan and international forces pushed the Taliban out of Rashidan district of Ghazni Province. The Taliban had taken control of the town only hours before. – *Reuters, May 30*

May 30, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Authorities arrested an Abu Sayyaf Group operative, Naim Jabdali, with suspected links to al-Qa`ida on Basilan Island in the southern Philippines. – *AHN, June 4*

May 30, 2008 (AZERBAIJAN): Eighteen men accused of having links with al-Qa`ida went on trial in Azerbaijan. The men were arrested in October and November 2007 and were found with machine guns, hand grenades, explosives and pistols. – *Reuters, May 30*

May 31, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed 10 people at a police checkpoint in the town of Hit, Anbar Province. Six policemen were among those killed, including the village's chief of police. – *AP, May 31*

May 31, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide car bomber struck NATO forces in Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, killing two NATO soldiers. – *AFP, May 31*

May 31, 2008 (LEBANON): Lebanese troops killed a man who was wearing a suicide belt near the Palestinian refugee camp of `Ayn al-Hilwa. The authorities released few details about the incident. – *Voice of America, May 31*

June 1, 2008 (SOMALIA): Alleged Islamist militants fired mortars at a plane carrying Somali Transitional Federal Government President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmad as it was about to take off from Mogadishu's airport. There were no casualties. – *CNN, June 1*

June 1, 2008 (SOMALIA): According to a press report, a new Islamic court has been established in Jowhar, the capital of Middle Shabelle region. The press report states that "many Jowhar locals have reportedly filed disputes with the Islamic Court, including disagreements over land ownership." – *Garowe Online, June 1*

June 2, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber detonated his explosives near the provincial police headquarters in Mosul, killing at least nine people, five of whom were policemen. – *AP, June 3*

June 2, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A car bomb exploded outside the Danish Embassy in Islamabad, killing six people including one Dane. Denmark's Security and Intelligence Service (PET) released a statement explaining, "It is PET's assessment that al-Qaeda or an al-Qaeda-related group likely is behind the attack." – *AP, June 3*

June 4, 2008 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audio statement in which he called on Muslims to "break the Siege of Gaza." Al-Zawahiri said, "The sons of the nation should break the shackles of the treacherous regimes [Arab governments in the Middle East] and move to wage jihad which has become a duty." The video was released to mark the anniversary of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. – *AP, June 4*

June 4, 2008 (GLOBAL): An alleged al-Qa`ida statement posted on an Islamist website claimed credit for the

June 2 attack on the Danish Embassy in Islamabad. The statement said that the attack was in retaliation for the republication of cartoons insulting the Prophet Muhammad in Danish newspapers. – *al-Jazeera, June 5*

June 4, 2008 (MOROCCO): Moroccan security forces said that the leader of al-Qa`ida in Morocco, whose name they did not release, accidentally killed himself while working in his weapons workshop around the date of May 27. – *UPI, June 4*

June 4, 2008 (ALGERIA): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives near a military facility on the outskirts of Algiers, wounding five people. Approximately five minutes after the explosion, a homemade bomb exploded outside a café regularly frequented by soldiers, injuring one person. – *AFP, June 4; BBC, June 5*

June 5, 2008 (ALGERIA): A roadside bomb destroyed a vehicle carrying Algerian soldiers in Boumerdes region, killing six of them. Authorities believe Islamist militants were to blame. – *AFP, June 8*

June 5, 2008 (UNITED STATES): Al-Qa`ida commander Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, who is considered the "principal architect" of the September 11, 2001 attacks, appeared in a U.S. military court in Guantanamo Bay. – *Bloomberg, June 5*

June 5, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber charged at a NATO patrol in Qalat, Zabul Province, detonating his explosives but failing to injure any international troops. Four civilians, however, were wounded. – *AFP, June 4*

June 6, 2008 (UNITED STATES): A U.S. appeals court upheld the conviction of American citizen Ahmed Abu Ali, who was sentenced to 30 years in prison for plotting to assassinate President George W. Bush and conspiring with al-Qa`ida. The appeals court also overturned Abu Ali's sentence, declaring that it was too lenient and sent his case back for resentencing. Abu Ali had appealed his conviction on the grounds that he had been tortured into confessing by Saudi security services. – *Reuters, June 6*

June 6, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Authorities captured Sali Dungkal Alih, a member of the Abu Sayyaf Group who was

allegedly responsible for the beheadings of 10 Philippine Marines in 2007. He was found on the island of Basilan. - *Macau Daily Times*, June 10

June 6, 2008 (THAILAND): Thai authorities announced that they had killed Alinsan Nikaji, an insurgent wanted for the killings of two Thai marines in 2005. His death occurred during a sizeable operation involving 100 police and soldiers in the village of Tanyong Limo, Narathiwat Province. - *AFP*, June 6

June 7, 2008 (IRAQ): An Iraqi official told reporters that authorities had arrested 13 suspected members of al-Qa`ida who were planning suicide operations. During the raids in the town of Hit in Anbar Province, 58 explosives belts were seized. - *Reuters*, June 8

June 7, 2008 (ISRAEL): Israeli soldiers killed a Palestinian militant as he was planting a bomb near the border with the Gaza Strip. - *Voice of America*, June 8

June 8, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber detonated his explosives near a patrol base in Kirkuk Province, killing one U.S. soldier and injuring 18 others. - *Reuters*, June 8; *Times Online*, June 8

June 8, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Suspected Taliban militants ambushed and killed four policemen in Matani near Peshawar. - *AFP*, June 9

June 8, 2008 (ALGERIA): Two bombs ripped through the town of Lakhdaria, killing an estimated 12 people. Among the dead were members of the security forces along with a French engineer and his driver. Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb later claimed credit for the operation. - *AFP*, June 8; *AP*, June 17

June 8, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Prominent television journalist Ces Drilon, her two person crew and a Muslim academic were all kidnapped by Abu Sayyaf Group fighters on Jolo Island in the southern Philippines. The ASG is demanding a ransom for their release. - *AFP*, June 10

June 9, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A police vehicle carrying recently freed Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi leader Sufi Muhammad was hit by a roadside bomb, yet the leader was unharmed. - *Dawn*, June 9

June 9, 2008 (SOMALIA): Somalia's Transitional Federal Government and the oppositionist Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia reached a cease-fire agreement. Islamist insurgents actively fighting in Somalia, however, were not party to the agreement. - *Shabelle Media Network*, June 11

June 10, 2008 (SOMALIA): Leading Somali Islamist opposition leaders rejected the June 9 cease-fire that was agreed to by the Transitional Federal Government and the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia. According to one journalist, the problem with the June 9 agreement "is that the deal was signed by just one splinter faction of the Islamist movement, which briefly controlled much of Somalia in 2006. After Ethiopian troops ousted the movement, many Islamist leaders went into hiding and the movement split into factions, some open to negotiations, others dead set against them." - *International Herald Tribune*, June 10

June 10, 2008 (SOMALIA): Islamist fighters attacked a police station in Mogadishu, in addition to the home of a district commissioner. - *Garowe Online*, June 10

June 10, 2008 (MOROCCO): A Moroccan court convicted 29 people who were part of the "Tetouan cell" for plotting terrorist attacks and supporting fighters in Iraq. The men, who were arrested in January 2007, were accused of having links to al-Qa`ida, among other terrorist organizations. They received sentences ranging from two to eight years, and two of the 29 were convicted in absentia. - *AP*, June 11

June 10, 2008 (LEBANON): The leader of Fatah al-Islam, Shaker Youssef al-Absi, released an audio recording warning that the time had come for revenge attacks, and that suicide fighters were ready for operations. The leader of the al-Qa`ida-inspired group remains at large, but is wanted by Lebanese authorities. - *AP*, June 10

June 11, 2008 (THAILAND): A roadside bomb exploded at the entrance to a contested village in Pattani Province, wounding four soldiers. - *The Nation*, June 11

June 12, 2008 (UNITED KINGDOM): A judge sentenced Yeshe Girma, the partner of would-be suicide bomber Hussain

Osman, to 15 years in jail after being found guilty by a jury the previous day for failing to provide information to the authorities of Osman's plan to detonate explosives on the London transportation system on July 21, 2005. Girma was also guilty of two other related crimes. She was among a number of suspects, such as two of Girma's siblings, to be found guilty for involvement in the incidents. - *AFP*, June 12

June 12, 2008 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that inmates held at Guantanamo Bay have a right to challenge their detentions in U.S. courts. - *AFP*, June 13

June 12, 2008 (YEMEN): U.S. counter-terrorism official Kenneth Wainstein urged Yemeni President `Ali `Abdullah Salih to release Jabir al-Banna and Jamal al-Badawi—two al-Qa`ida suspects—into U.S. custody. - *AP*, June 12

June 12, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A male suicide bomber disguised in a burqa was shot by authorities as he charged a police compound in Helmand Province. He failed to detonate his explosives. - *The Australian*, June 12

June 12, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Suspected Abu Sayyaf Group fighters holding three ABS-CBN employees hostage released cameraman Angelo Valderama. Well-known reporter Ces Drilon and cameraman Jimmy Encarnacion are still being held captive. - *AP*, June 13

June 12, 2008 (SOMALIA): Islamist fighters launched mortars at the Mogadishu airport as President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmad was preparing to board his plane. The president managed to fly off safely. Islamist fighters conducted a similar attack on June 1. - *AP*, June 12

June 12, 2008 (ISRAEL): Israeli soldiers killed two Palestinian militants as they were planting a bomb near the border with the Gaza Strip. - *AP*, June 12

June 13, 2008 (IRAQ): Iraqi authorities claimed that they killed Abu Bakr al-Sa`udi, a Saudi national and alleged senior al-Qa`ida in Iraq leader, in Anbar Province. Four of his aides were also killed. - *AFP*, June 13

June 13, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters staged a coordinated attack on

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

the Sarposha prison in Kandahar Province and managed to release approximately 870 prisoners. The fighters first used a truck bomb to destroy the front gate of the facility, while a suicide bomber attacked the rear of the building. Fighters then stormed the prison, releasing the inmates, of whom about 390 were imprisoned Taliban. - *Los Angeles Times*, June 14; *AP*, June 15

June 13, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide car bomber attacked a U.S. military convoy in Nangarhar Province. There were conflicting accounts of casualties. - *CBS News*, June 13

June 13, 2008 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. Treasury Department froze the assets of the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society's Kuwaiti headquarters. The Islamic charity denied any al-Qa`ida links. Its Afghanistan and Pakistan offices suffered similar measures in 2002. - *AFP*, June 13

June 13, 2008 (UNITED STATES): Three Ohio state residents were convicted of planning attacks on Americans overseas, including on U.S. soldiers in Iraq. The three men convicted by the Toledo federal court were Mohammad Amawi (a U.S. citizen), Marwan el-Hindi (a naturalized U.S. citizen) and Wassim Mazlou (a legal permanent U.S. resident). According to a Reuters report, the men "engaged in a conspiracy that involved firearms training and instructions to build improvised explosive devices and suicide bomb vests...They also sought to recruit others to participate in jihad training, solicited funding for the training, and proposed sites for training in firearms, explosives and hand-to-hand combat." - *Reuters*, June 13

June 13, 2008 (DENMARK): The head of Denmark's Security and Intelligence Service (PET) told reporters that al-Qa`ida is "steering, training and planning...a terror attack on Danish soil." PET chief Jakob Scharf said that today's younger generation of militants "are better, more dedicated and better trained." - *Reuters*, June 13

June 14, 2008 (IRAQ): A female suicide bomber detonated her explosives near a group of football fans in Diyala Province celebrating Iraq's win over China in a World Cup qualifying game. Twenty-five people were wounded. - *AFP*, June 14

June 14, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): U.S.-led forces killed 15 insurgents holed up in a farming compound in Kandahar Province. - *Reuters*, June 15

June 14, 2008 (UNITED ARAB EMIRATES): The British Embassy in Abu Dhabi posted a statement on its website warning Britons that the UAE faces "a high threat of terrorism." According to the statement, "We believe terrorists may be planning to carry out attacks in the UAE. Attacks could be indiscriminate and could happen at any time." - *Guardian*, June 17

June 15, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan and international forces killed two Taliban militants in Arghandab district of Zabul Province. - *AFP*, June 16

June 15, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan President Hamid Karzai warned that he would send Afghan troops into Pakistan to attack Taliban militants if they were caught conducting cross-border raids. - *Reuters*, June 15